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"TURN TO GOD – REJOICE IN HOPE": UNFOLDING THE EIGHTH ASSEMBLY THEME

World Council of Churches

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The quarterly of the World Council of Churches

Editorial

This issue of *The Ecumenical Review* presents a diverse collection of lively and substantial essays on the theme for the World Council of Churches' eighth assembly (Harare, Zimbabwe, December 1998): "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope".

One thinks first of an assembly theme in relation to the event of the assembly itself. There the theme should inspire, challenge and offer a focus for the participants in their worship, daily life and work. It should provide an overall framework for the delegates' reflections and decisions and help the ecumenical movement to look beyond the assembly to the years – and the issues – ahead. But this is by no means its only role, for the assembly theme is also active long before the assembly takes place. It is "at work", seeking to be "received", among the churches and within the ecumenical community, offering all of us encouragement and resources in our preparations for the assembly. Then after an assembly the theme may provide a lens through which to view the event as a whole, to assess its achievements and problems, and to help to direct our future ecumenical energies.

Let us say at once: the theme of the Harare assembly – this "surprising combination of two imperatives" (as one of our authors notes) – is complex, and challenging in its interpretation. New aspects and possibilities in the theme and new lines of thought spurred by it continue to appear. It has recently occurred to me, for example, to ask: does the theme really speak, as many have assumed, about God the first person of the trinity? Does the theme really turn, after the Christocentric themes of Evanston, New Delhi, Nairobi and Vancouver, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit at the most recent assembly at Canberra, back towards the perspective of the first assembly at Amsterdam? Or does it rather point forward, intending to invoke *God the trinity*, thus bringing themes and impulses from the WCC's whole 50 years to a new focus? Is that the undiscovered wisdom of the theme, drawing us into new and deeper dimensions of our common faith even as we look to a new stage of and vision for the ecumenical movement?

Others will have their own fresh perspectives on and insights into the theme. What is clear is that, if the theme is to play its role ecumenically as we approach the assembly, further materials are needed: explorations which cast fresh light on it, which turn it about so that its various facets appear more clearly, or which focus more closely on a particular facet in relation to other aspects of the theme, to particular dimensions of the Christian faith and engagement or to crucial issues facing the churches and the ecumenical movement today. To be sure, some material related directly to the assembly theme, or bearing generally upon it, has already appeared in *The Ecumenical Review* and in other WCC publications,[1] and valuable material is also being produced within the churches and through organizations such as the United Bible Societies.[2] The aim of this issue of *The Ecumenical Review* is to supply what has so far been lacking: a coherent and sustained collection of essays in which a variety of authors, reflecting the diversity and vitality of our worldwide faith, wrestle with the assembly theme in all its complexity.

The topics covered may briefly be indicated. There is an exploration of this and previous assembly themes within their own world and ecumenical context – that is, as clues to turning points in the history of the ecumenical movement through the past 50 years. Some essays approach the theme through theological analysis and reflection; others develop its biblical basis. Still others treat aspects of the theme in detail: "Turn to God" – but to *which* God do we turn? "Rejoice in Hope" – but exactly *why*, and *how* in today's world?

There are specifically "confessional" approaches to the theme (reflecting Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox viewpoints), along with challenging suggestions for *new forms of engagement* with various kinds of ecumenical partners (the Roman Catholic Church, evangelicals, national councils of churches). The theme is explored as a resource for the life of local churches. There are further reflections on the implications of the theme for the churches in Africa (touching on the dimension of Christian formation), and in relation to the new challenges facing the churches in particular regions, such as Eastern Europe. There are reflections on the theme from the perspectives of women, and on the experiences and insights from the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-98) in light of the appeal made in the assembly theme to "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope".

In addition there are explorations of the theme in relation to particular dimensions of the Christian faith and life: in relation to mission in face of today's challenges and opportunities; in relation to justice, as a resource for the church's commitment to work for liberation and reconciliation, and as a basis for hope in the face of hopelessness; in relation to diakonia (service) as an extension of the churches' material and spiritual koinonia in today's world. Finally the notion of jubilee, which stems from the biblical "year of release" (Leviticus 25:8-55) and also recalls that 1998 is the 50th anniversary of the founding of the WCC, has served for many as an interpretative key with which to understand the theme "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope". This important motif is examined in several of the essays, as well as in an extended review of a recent book in which Christians and Jews explore together the implications of the jubilee tradition for today.[3]

Mirroring the diversity of topics and perspectives in these essays is the diversity of their authors. They reflect a wide range of confessional, regional and cultural identities; and, to a degree unusual perhaps even for *The Ecumenical Review*, they have

brought to their task a broad variety of *styles*: some are more academic in their approach, some more abstract, some more concrete, some more reflective or meditative, some frankly provocative. They speak one and all from their reflections on the theme, from their experiences of celebration, sorrow or struggle, and in some cases from the severe testing of their hopes. To one and all we offer our sincere thanks for their contributions. It is appropriate here also to record our sadness at the passing away of John Howard Yoder, who was looking forward to writing for this issue at the time of his death on 30 December 1997.

I spoke earlier of our authors as "wrestling" with this assembly theme. The term is used advisedly, for serious engagement with this theme calls for our spiritual, moral and emotional commitment and for our best thinking. A reading of these essays will confirm that such an engagement, while demanding, can be richly rewarding.

THOMAS F. BEST

NOTES

[1] See Thomas F. Best, "'Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope'": An Approach to the Theme of the Eighth Assembly of the WCC", *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, July 1996, pp.401-14; and, more generally, the essays in the issue of *The Ecumenical Review* (vol. 49, no. 4, Oct. 1997) devoted to "African Perspectives" towards the assembly. See also *Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope: Bible Studies, Meditations, Liturgical Aids*, Geneva, WCC, 1996 (repr. 1998); and Sebastian Bakare, *The Drumbeat of Life: Jubilee in an African Context*, Geneva, WCC, 1997. These two books are also available in French, German and Spanish.

[2] See for example J.S. Pobee, *Celebrating the Jubilee of the World Council of Churches: A Christian Council of Ghana Contribution to the World Council of Churches' 8th Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe*, Accra, Christian Council of Ghana/Asempa Publishers, 1998; and the "scripture portion", or collection of biblical texts, on the assembly theme being prepared by the United Bible Societies in collaboration with the WCC.

[3] Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge – Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Geneva, WCC, 1997.

What Happened Next

Reflections on WCC Assembly Themes

Patrick Henry

Eight years ago, for the January 1991 issue of *The Ecumenical Review* looking forward to the seventh World Council assembly (Canberra), I was asked to write a piece imagining the future of ecumenism in the ensuing forty years. Now I am asked to look the other way, and reflect on the journey of the WCC during its first half century, to be celebrated in the Jubilee eighth assembly in Harare later this year. Since writing the earlier article I have come across a remark of the English historian G. M. Young that captures, better than any other sentence I have ever read, the puzzle and the challenge lodged at the intersection of retrospect and prophecy: "The first lesson of history, and it may well be the last, is that you never know what is coming next."[1] Thirty-five hundred words for fifty years averages seventy words per year, and in this sentence I have already used twenty so what I say will be impressionistic. I am going to return to 1948, and think first about what might have seemed then a plausible prediction about the future, and compare and contrast that picture with what has actually happened, with "what came next".

There were "giants in the earth" in those days. Bell, Berggrav, Boegner, Kraemer, Mott, Niemöller, Niles, Oldham, Tomkins, Van Dusen, Visser 't Hooft, and the like brought with them into a new day the weight of their witness through the long dark night of Christendom's collapse. They were the channel through which the grand tradition, nearly two millennia long, of "God's Design" had survived its passage through the twentieth century's intensification of "Man's Disorder". By 1948 there were plenty of signs that the postwar world was full of peril (the Iron Curtain, mayhem in the Indian subcontinent, the election of the National Party in South Africa, to name a few), but I suspect that the church leaders gathered in Amsterdam believed that the Christian theological tradition *as they had learned it and were teaching it* was up to the challenge. The Tradition (to use the capitalized form that would soon become nor-

• Patrick Henry is executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. He dedicates this article to his predecessor at the Institute (1974-84) and Associate General Secretary and Director of the Division of Studies of the WCC (1954-63; previously Programme Secretary of the WCC New York Office, 1948-54), Robert S. Bilheimer, now living in retirement in New Jersey, in his eighty-first year. He thanks spring semester resident scholars at the Institute for their seminar discussion of these issues with him: Agnès Antoine (Roman Catholic, France), Eugene Botha (Reformed, South Africa), Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Pentecostal, Finland), and from the USA, Jon Armajani (Presbyterian, California), Paul Bassett (Church of the Nazarene, Kansas), David Hackett (Roman Catholic, Florida), Robert King (United Methodist, Mississippi), Delrio Ligons-Berry (Presbyterian, Pennsylvania), Wendy Young (Episcopalian, Florida).

mative) was adequate; the problem was that the many traditions were frittering away the Tradition's power. Christendom was gone in Europe (it succumbed later in North America), but the leaders of the WCC were confident *they knew who knew how* to articulate God's design. There was widespread agreement on what constituted theological *credentials*.

Assembly themes are certainly not the only clues we have to the spirit of the WCC and its development, but they are instructive, because a lot of thought and discussion are devoted to their formulation, and their rhetorical shape tells us as much as their specific content about the ethos of ecumenism in their time. "Man's Disorder and God's Design" (Amsterdam 1948) is a brave declaration in face of worldwide catastrophe, and also a succinct summary of a characteristically Protestant, especially Reformed, assessment of the human situation. There would of course be fierce debates in those early years between neo-orthodox and other theologians, but the WCC at its founding had no doubt that original sin, pride, defiance of God were the theologically most significant human characteristics. The church, instructed by theologians who read the Bible in this way, could not claim to express God's design fully, but the church, so instructed, *knew* the design.

The Trinity

The name "God" appears again in the themes only now, half a century later, in "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" (Harare 1998). The Trinitarian basis of the WCC is strong and sure, and true Trinitarianism always recognizes the activity of all the persons in each (and "God" suggests more than the First Person), but rhetorical signals from the themes in the intervening period suggest the Second Person is "more equal" than the others. What is even more striking than the appearance of Christ by name in four themes – "Christ – the Hope of the World" (Evanston 1954), "Jesus Christ – the Light of the World" (New Delhi 1961), "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites" (Nairobi 1975), and "Jesus Christ – the Life of the World" (Vancouver 1983) – is the confident assertiveness of each of them. No one would suppose there was unanimity on the meaning of these images and verbs drawn from Scripture, but the themes themselves give no hint that Christ might be a "problem". And the addition of "Jesus" to "Christ" in the last three of these themes intensifies the particularity of specifically Christian claims. One might think that "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" is a reassertion of a broader theological horizon after a long sojourn in a narrower theological field.

There are, to be sure, two other themes in the half-century of assemblies. "Behold, I Make All Things New" (Uppsala 1968) quotes God (Rev. 21:5). The theme must have been chosen many months prior to the assembly, and I wonder whether the formulators in prospect had any idea just how many things would be made "new" in 1968, one of the most chaotic years ever in the United States, and in much of the rest of the world too. The rhetorical difference from twenty years before, "Man's Disorder and God's Design", is striking. The earlier theme presupposed knowledge of God's design to correct man's disorder. The later theme disavows clear knowledge, except knowledge that God has promised to make all things new. An argument from design is giving way to an argument from trust. And the argument was not an easy one, for 1968 would challenge the trust of many Christians in God's design in making all things new.

The Third Person of the Trinity made it into the half century, with "Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation" (Canberra 1991). As has been noted often, this is the first theme in the form of a prayer, and the prayer is from extra-biblical tradition (*Veni Sancte Spiritus* and *Veni Creator*, medieval hymn-texts used in the liturgies of Pentecost). Like Uppsala's theme, it trusts more than it claims, and the assembly generated more heated controversy than any previous one (or at least more controversy that got popular attention through the press). I am sure there were people at Canberra who looked nostalgically back to the days when the focus was clear, on Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever, not on the Holy Spirit who blows where she wills. But the theological change from Amsterdam to Canberra is more than Trinitarian. It is from declaration to exploration, from knowledge to prayer.

"What was coming next"

I have not attended any of the assemblies, so I have no first-hand sense of what any of them felt like, let alone what it was like to be at several or all of them. Written reports, however, and reminiscences of friends who have been there, suggest a significant shift in ethos, in tone, in centre of gravity, and the terrain mapped by the themes appears to have changed, in some ways quite radically, and certainly in many ways that no one would have predicted were "coming next."

The "what was coming next" that could have been at best seen dimly at Amsterdam was the challenge, from two directions, to the adequacy of the Tradition as normatively understood. From within the churches that were part of the WCC, feminist and liberationist theologies, the latter fuelled by the astonishingly rapid dismantling of political colonialism around the world and its equally rapid replacement by economic exploitation, would clamour for a hearing, and would contest the very claim of the Tradition as received to be normative. They would object to that formulation's being treated as the non-qualified standard to which others must assimilate, as though Niebuhr and Tillich were "theology", not "white male Eurocentric theology". From another direction, two huge parts of the Christian family, not part of the ecumenical movement that had eventuated in the WCC, entered the ecumenical arena and added different components and nuances to the Tradition. For anyone at Amsterdam in 1948 to have imagined what was going to happen at the Second Vatican Council would have required foresight bordering on lunacy. And a prediction of the appearance on the ecumenical scene of evangelicals and Pentecostals, who are still warily finding their way, would have seemed laughable.

Bilheimer, Stransky and God's topsy-turvy world

To turn first to this second direction, I can make the point by recounting the stories of two of my close friends and ecumenical mentors. Robert S. Bilheimer organized the first three assemblies, and as WCC director of studies was instrumental in shaping ecumenical thought. Bob is a Presbyterian minister, trained at Yale by some of the greatest Protestant minds of the twentieth century: Roland Bainton, Robert Calhoun, Kenneth Scott Latourette, H. Richard Niebuhr. If anyone had said to Bob Bilheimer at Amsterdam or Evanston or New Delhi that the final decade of his working career would be spent directing an ecumenical institute founded by Benedictine monks and located adjacent to a monastery, that he would consider Roman Catholics to be the most creative bearers of the ecumenical breakthrough he had helped fashion,

I am pretty sure Bob would have been incredulous. God might be doing new things, but there were limits.

Thomas F. Stransky, CSP, was president of the Paulist Fathers when I first met him, in 1976. Father Isaac Hecker founded the Paulists in the nineteenth century with the clear intention of converting Protestants to the one true church. Tom Stransky was already in 1976 well on the way to becoming an ecumenical hero. He had helped organize the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960 (Pope John XXIII was laying the groundwork even before he announced the Council), had hosted Protestant observers at the Council, and was tireless in establishing relations with other Christians around the world. We have all become accustomed to Catholic leadership in ecumenical thought and action, but in the 1950s it would have required more stretch than most Protestant (or Catholic) imaginations could manage to believe that before long the movement would receive such a "jump start" from so unexpected a quarter, and the thought that a Paulist would be in the forefront would have seemed the idlest of daydreams.

There was a day early in my career as Bob Bilheimer's successor at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research that stands out in my memory as a classic instance of "you never know what is coming next". In the morning I had a visit with the Abbot of Saint John's Abbey and in the afternoon with the executive director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Minneapolis. Had anyone suggested to me, when I was growing up in mainline Protestant Texas in the 1950s, that my career would bring me to a day like that, I'd have been as incredulous as Bob Bilheimer would have been about his career taking him to Saint John's. And as my acquaintance across the Christian family has expanded, I have come to appreciate more and more a truth that I believe has had, or will have if it hasn't already, a foundation-shaking effect on the ecumenical movement, including the WCC: *no one's ecumenical story is privileged.*

No ecumenical story is privileged

At a conference at our Institute in 1994, to which 208 persons, ranging in age from seventeen to eighty-seven, and from forty-one different Christian traditions, came, several veterans of the ecumenical enterprise as I used to know it complained sharply that many of the participants didn't know "the tradition" (the WCC, BEM, Toronto, and so on), and how could we accomplish anything if that basic knowledge could not be presupposed. A member of a Holiness tradition, as committed an ecumenist as I know, quietly, and decisively, responded, "Yes, but that's your ecumenical story, it's not mine." I was reminded, when I heard this, of another remark he made some years before, after listening with interest and discernment to a discussion of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the landmark Faith and Order document of 1982. "That's all well and good, but baptism, eucharist, and ministry are not our issues." He alerted me to ecumenical sectarianism.

The discovery, or recognition, of ecumenical sectarianism is, I believe, the single most unexpected "next thing" that has happened to ecumenism since 1948. That there can be Catholic ecumenism, that Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, should get far more attention, arouse far more enthusiasm, among Protestant ecumenists than any recent document from the WCC, is simply a fact beyond the hopes (and maybe even fears) of ecumenists fifty years ago. That there is a professor of ecu-

menics at Fuller Theological Seminary would be as surprising to the founders of Fuller as to the founders of the WCC, and to the latter it would be doubly astonishing that the incumbent, Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., is an Assemblies of God pastor.

The appearance over the ecumenical horizon of huge churches that were not in the movement in the early days (a billion Roman Catholics and four hundred million Pentecostals, not among the 330 WCC member churches, constitute well over half the Christians in the world) has made very clear that there are many ecumenical stories, each with its own claim to authenticity. A meeting to take place this spring, between the Society for Pentecostal Studies and the Wesleyan Theological Society, registers an ecumenical breakthrough as unlikely and as dramatic as any in this century, but with almost no direct links to the *institutional* history of the WCC. Classical conciliar ecumenism certainly helped create the atmosphere for Holiness-Pentecostal rapprochement, in quite specific ways through the attendance of many observers at all sorts of WCC discussions. And it is very clear that the presence of observers, and sometimes participants, from non-member churches has profoundly widened the WCC's awareness of the range of ecumenical stories.

Previously unnoticed voices

Unexpected voices from hitherto uninvolved churches have been a big part of "what came next" following Amsterdam. But previously unnoticed voices from hitherto involved people have been, I believe, the most unsettling, creative, disorienting, and reorienting of all the "whats" that have "come next". Feminist and liberation theologians have insisted that the Christian theological tradition *as it had been learned and was being taught* was not up to the challenge of the modern world, and, even more to the point, was not an adequate rendition of the gospel. The WCC has had to learn (and it has done so with amazing grace, given the profundity of the challenge and when compared to the sorry examples given by so many other institutions) that business as usual, even high-level, expert, learned, well-meaning business as usual, will not do.

There is of course a more general intellectual critique at work here. Post-modernism, elusive a concept as it is, puts under suspicion anyone who claims to have found "the" way to analyze, "the" way to understand. However, I believe the phenomenon of post-modernism is antedated by the insistence of Christian women, and Christians in the developing world, that the promises of God are for them too, and that their credentials have an authority at least equal to that of recognized "theologians". In a sense, the Second Person character of Christian theology – it's about a God who became incarnate – has become increasingly clear as theology's embodiment – gendered, classed, raced, contextualized in a hundred ways – as against its "pure thought" illusion, has become clear and insistent in the latter half of the twentieth century, to a degree I don't think anybody anticipated.

The people who planned Amsterdam were a lot more alike than are the people planning Harare. No WCC assembly has been easy to organize, none has been easy to run. But, as the years have gone by, the accents, presuppositions, preoccupations, the range of gospel mandates impinging on the thousands of choices that have to be made in creating such a programme have multiplied. The house of God with many rooms has become an image corresponding more closely than the body of Christ to ecumenical reality. I'm sure there were fierce debates about agenda in the early years, but I

doubt those debates were very much about who had the right to set the agenda. Content was debatable, process was tacitly agreed on by the kinds of people who had always set agendas. There were fights, but everybody knew the rules.

My own awakening to new voices demanding new relationships came in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I was spokesperson for the Admissions Committee at Swarthmore College. Black students rejected a report on minority admissions. In an all-college meeting I pleaded with them for more dialogue. They replied: "We're tired of dialogue; we want you to listen." I learned that dialogue, valuable as it is, can be oppressive to those who are not involved in setting the agenda. After I thought I had made a thorough feminist conversion, I was talking with some women colleagues and was stunned when they said, "We want you for an ally, but we don't want you to tell us what to do." I was nine years old when the Amsterdam assembly was held, so I would have understood little about it, its significance, the way it operated. But I was already being formed as a white Protestant North Atlantic male, accustomed to determining how things would be done. It was simply "natural" for me to be in charge. What I learned when challenged by the black students and by my female colleagues was, in very small compass, what the original leaders of the WCC were going to discover when it turned out that "what happened next" was the clamour of a whole host of voices they weren't accustomed to noticing.

Jubilee, design and disorder

As I have reflected on the journey of the assembly themes, and have arrived at the eighth, for an Assembly that is still to happen, I have come to see the brilliance of emphasizing the biblical tradition of jubilee and downplaying the millennium, which is getting all the hype it needs and plenty to spare, and which I suspect will disappoint us because we expect it will be a big deal when it's only the turn of another year.

There is much, very much to celebrate in the fifty years since Amsterdam. The WCC is in various kinds of trouble, but so are virtually all institutions these days, and I estimate the WCC's dilemmas as no worse than average. Indeed, they are radically different from most institutional hassles, and are actually full of hope, because the WCC is not obsessed with institutional survival and aggrandizement. The WCC is heeding the word of the one identified in four of its assembly themes as Hope, Light, Life, source of freedom and unity: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). In many quarters today "God talk" comes far more easily than it did a half century ago. The WCC has encouraged Christians of many varieties to become theologically more confident because we have helped each other expand the range of our vocabularies. The WCC's attention to worship has helped the churches drink deep from the wells of liturgical renewal, wells freshened so amazingly by the historical and aesthetic labours of scholars from many traditions, with Roman Catholics in the lead. In liturgical scholarship, as in church historical study generally and pre-eminently in biblical interpretation, ecumenical is really the only game in town.

But jubilee is not just celebration. It is also repentance, reconciliation, release, and return. To the extent people still insist their way is "theology" and every other way must be assimilated to it, "what has happened next" has not fully happened. Theological arrogance, wherever it rears its head, requires repentance. And maybe 1998 can be a time of reconciliation, in which oppressors and victims are both

released from the bondage of "the way we are used to doing things". Erasmus, in *The Praise of Folly*, puts into Folly's mouth some of the wisest words I've ever heard: We must learn to "make mistakes together or individually..., [and] wisely overlook things."[2] "Wisely overlooking things" would be a good start for a year of Jubilee.

While writing this set of reflections I have found my eye recurring to the theme of Amsterdam 1948, "Man's Disorder and God's Design". It seems so emblematic of that time, or at least of how I suppose that time was. And as I have thought about how different this time, Harare 1998, is, I have begun to think that the ecumenical message of hope for the world now is "Our Designs and God's Disorder". I can rejoice in hope because I believe God disrupts our designs, our schemes, our little systems that have their day, whether academic or political or ecclesiastical. I could say something here about analogies to chaos (or complexity) theory in physics and cosmology, to deconstructionist theories in literary criticism, to healing practices of psychotherapy that can make headway only when we relinquish control, when the patterns we've boxed ourselves into are dismantled. But I have run out of room, and this is a subject for another occasion. I have been asked only to comment on the theme of Harare. Had I been asked to edit it, after "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" I would have added, "and Improvise."

NOTES

[1] Quoted in W. D. Handcock, introduction to G. M. Young, *Victorian Essays*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 10.

[2] Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, in John P. Dolan, trans., *The Essential Erasmus*, New York, New American Library, 1964, p. 113.

"Everyone Suddenly Burst Out Singing"

Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope

Flora Winfield

> Because I cannot hope to turn again
> Consequently I rejoice,
> having to construct something
> Upon which to rejoice
>
> T.S. Eliot
> Ash Wednesday, 1930

What does it mean to turn and rejoice? If, at this moment, in this place, we want to search out the evidence of divine activity in the created universe, to find God at work, in order to "turn to God", where should we direct our attention? It may be that in many people's lives and experience, in many places, the marks of God's loving action in the human community seem hard to identify; and there it is a tremendous act of faith, of wilful construction, to turn to the God revealed in scripture and known in tradition, experience, reason and relationship. So, what does it mean to turn to God in this context – in very-late-twentieth-century Europe, in the closing years of a millennium, and at the end of a century which has been as no century has been before, a century of martyrs, of wars, of genocide and of change, change which may – but it is not yet clear – become transformation?

In this context the churches face a profound challenge: to "turn to God" in a way which speaks of the hope of the resurrection and yet does not deny the unspeakably, unimaginably dreadful, deliberately brutal reality of much of this century. Optimism is not enough: this context, as does the human condition throughout history, demands a faithful, truthful theology of sin, if our theology of rejoicing is not to seem naive, foolish and vain, crying "peace, peace" to those in anger, pain and guilt.

So turning to God must, first of all, be an act of repentance. And in order to make this repentance in a truthful and credible way the churches, as well as calling on soci-

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ety to reflect on its fallenness, must also come face to face with the painful reality of their own complicity with, and sometimes participation in, the brokenness around us. We must be prepared to ask how far our divisions, as churches, are those of doctrine, and how far they reflect the dividedness of the human communities in which we are set. And we must be prepared to ask whether we have failed to respond to God's call to be agents of healing and reconciliation in a divided world.

In the English context the ecumenical divide is located not only between, but across, the churches: common strands of evangelicalism, charismatic renewal, liberalism or sacramentalism are found in almost every denomination; and in addition to the historic doctrinal divisions, and to these "common strands" which link those in different traditions but may divide those in the same church, there are also complex patterns of division which reflect the divided nature of English society. The clarity of these divisions has been somewhat blurred by increasing mobility and rapid social change, but the English churches still bear the marks of our division by social class: in one rural-industrial village, where a mine was once the main employer, those who live to the west of the railway line are still largely Anglican and employers, while those to the east of the railway tend to come from Methodist backgrounds and, if in work, to be in low-paid jobs. In rural areas, communities may continue to identify themselves as "church" or "chapel"; these are divisions largely determined by history and social class, although the decline of rural free church participation, with the closure of village chapels and a retreat to market-town centres, is changing these patterns of denominational loyalty. In many instances the closure of a village chapel means the disappearance of its remaining congregation, whose existence expresses loyalty to the buildings and the community established by great-grandparents and which cannot simply be translated into a twelve-mile drive to another "parish" on Sunday mornings. In other situations chapel-goers have become part of the parish church congregation, bringing with them traditions of personal commitment and faithfulness – vivid hymns, attention to scripture and rigorous preaching which enrich and renew the lives of the congregations of which they become a part. But these situations are generally those where good relations of long standing between church and chapel already existed, and they reflect a certain courage, which should not be understimated, on all sides to break down barriers of class and culture.

In England, churches have also reflected the racial divisions of our society. When people came here from the Caribbean to work in the 1950s and 1960s they were not made welcome here in those churches from which they came. As a result many people moved from the Anglican, Methodist or Roman Catholic traditions in which they had been brought up, to found or join new churches, which often reflected particular elements of those traditions, and where the congregation and leadership were black. Often these congregations met as "tenants" of white congregations, using their buildings for worship at different times, and relationships between "landlords" and "tenants" have not always been good. In recent years, many black-majority churches and councils of churches have become members of the ecumenical structures, both locally and nationally, through Churches Together in England. Their contribution to the English ecumenical scene is greatly appreciated, but tensions and divisions remain, not only for those in black-majority churches, but also for black Christians worshipping in the "historic" churches. The story of black Christians in England in the last 50 years is not one in which the English churches can take much pride.

These two examples, of social class and race, and of the participation of the churches in the broken and divided nature of the human community, perhaps make clear one reason why work for the unity of the church is so difficult: in healing the hurts in the body of Christ we are also healing the hurts of the human community, as reflected in our churches.

But if this makes ecumenism harder, it also makes it even more important. What more powerful ecumenical imperative could there be than the fact of the participation of the churches in the division of the human community, and the failure of broken churches to be agents of healing and reconciliation in a broken world? In England the consequences of these divisions have been felt in inequalities in housing, education, health and opportunities: in other places in Europe, they have led to terrorism, war and genocide. The task of healing and reconciliation is far too important for us to allow it to be impeded by the dividedness of churches: a dividedness which must be named as a *state of sin*, a state which should lead us to a profound and shameful repentance, a state which leads us to "turn to God" with a renewed sense of our need for God, and for one another in our diversity.

It is particularly ironic that these sins of participation in the brokenness of the human community – racism, class consciousness, and others – should reflect so damningly our fear of the different, the diverse, as defined by ourselves as "the norm". It is ironic because if anything has been the besetting sin of twentieth-century Europe, it is this *fear of diversity*, a fear reflected in fascism, nationalism, racism: while a three-personed God, worshipped in dynamic community and relationship, reveals to us, in God's own life, the beauty and significance of interdependence and inter-relationship in unity and diversity.

As we turn to God in repentance, we find that to turn to God is also to turn to one another. Turning to God can never be an absolutely private act by an individual; because Christianity is the religion of the incarnation, "turning to God" is always also a turning to our neighbours. As we learn our need of God, we also learn our need for one another in all our God-created variety and diversity: my healing and liberation are intimately bound up with yours, and with everyone's. So to turn to God with one's whole attention is also to turn with that attention to humanity, made in God's image and called to turn, to return, to God. Such openness to one another and to God calls for a willingness to be vulnerable to God and to one another. This is necessary if we are to move from repentance to know our need to be *renewed* together, as churches, to face the challenges of our context and to take up afresh the gospel task of healing, reconciliation and liberation. Through this dynamic of repentance, renewal and reconciliation to God and to one another, in the context of the transformation of human community into Godly human community, we are called to recognize that, however broken by sin and division, or bound up in the brokenness of the human community, the churches may be, the church is always God's work, always to be reformed but always shot through with grace, the creative work of the Holy Spirit, a gospel structure, a sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves as churches: if division is often the historical consequence of resisting renewal, then what kind of unity might we find in accepting our need to be renewed together, *as* churches?

So what are the qualities which characterize this dynamic of repentance, reconciliation and renewal which is expressed in the life of the body of Christ? If our unity is

to offer some glimpse of God's own nature, to reflect something of the life of the trinity, then it must be a dynamic unity, embracing diversity and variety in relationship. This kind of unity is also essentially inclusive, challenging our attempts to define and restrict both God and God's call to a unity which fulfils the longing desire of all creation to come in to one-ness. Our longing for and working towards this unity which embraces diversity is one of the most powerful ways in which the churches can proclaim the kingdom of God, who is a community of persons in unity and who calls us to be ecumenical instruments of healing and liberation.

This kind of community is characterized by *kenosis* – that willing, generous self-emptying, self-offering which is Christ's pattern for our relationship with one another. This kenotic quality for our relations is essential if we are to come into *koinonia* with God and with one another, and is expressed in a number of ways:

- In a readiness to re-examine our own cherished traditions in light of God's call to unity. As we find our self-definition, our sense of identity and belonging in those things which *differentiate* us from one another, our churches, our nations from others, we must ask ourselves why certain ideas and practices or traditions feel important to us: are they of the gospel? Are they the gifts which God has entrusted to our tradition during the years of the churches' division, that we might re-present them to the church in its unity? Or are they a once-valuable inheritance, which we should be willing to offer up for the sake of unity? Such sacrifices may not be asked of us, but the possibility of this kind of generous offering, and the willingness to count others as first, must be a part of the pattern of our love for one another.
- In the quality of our turning to one another, listening to one another with seriousness and understanding disagreement or conflict among us as a constructive process of discernment of our common calling.
- In living together with an appropriate sense of our own fallibility and challengeability: knowing that my rightness does not define your wrongness.
- In praying for unity, that God's will should be done in the churches' life, with authenticity and integrity: this is a prayer which requires a profoundly kenotic approach, as we willingly open ourselves to renewal together, accepting that things which feel important to us may be challenged and changed.

In turning to God and to one another in repentance, reconciliation, renewal and kenosis, we begin to set together the table of the great feast, that koinonia-table at which there is a place for everyone, and at which all can eat and be satisfied. This table of God's generosity is set in God's peaceable and just household in the face of all our greed and violence; and, as we hinted before, this dynamic of repentance, renewal, reconciliation, kenosis and koinonia, which calls us to turn and to rejoice, must be underpinned with an adequate theology of sin and of hope, a theology which takes seriously our potential for evil, for the conscious choice of what we know to be bad, as well as for good. For if we do not have a faithful and truthful theology of sin, then we cannot take seriously the anger, pain and guilt of our context: for many people in Europe at the end of the twentieth century, and of this millennium, to turn to God is to turn screaming, crying, despairing, hungry for a last hope. Our theology of sin and of hope must bear the judgment of our century and all its crimes against humanity, and our hope cannot be a facile optimism in the face of such pain, but a profound assurance of Christ's intimate, suffering understanding of all the darkest places, even those hours before Easter morning.

Everyone suddenly burst out singing:
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields: on- on- and out of sight.
Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted:
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears: and horror
Drifted away .... O, but Everyone
Was a bird: and the song was wordless: the singing will never be done.

Siegfried Sassoon, April 1919[1]

NOTE

[1] "Everyone Sang", from *War Poems*; copyright George Sassoon 1983.

Turning from Death to Life

A Biblical Reflection on Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)

Dorothy A. Lee

Imagery of "turning" is integral to the story of Mary Magdalene in John 20:1-18. In this, the first of the Johannine resurrection narratives, the verb "turn" literally occurs twice (Greek *strephein*), as Mary turns to face the one she seeks, without at first recognizing him (20:14,16). On a theological level, Magdalene's physical motion represents the turning from grief and sorrow to joy and hope in the discovery of Easter faith. This article is written for the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches. Through exegetical study and also imaginative meditation, we seek a Johannine perspective on the assembly theme: "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope".

The notion of turning is central to the narrative and theological structure of John's gospel. This gospel's main concern is the revelation of God's saving glory and the human response of faith, signifying the turning from darkness to light, from death to life. Throughout the narrative, glory is revealed in the person and ministry of Jesus, a glory that has its material origins in the incarnation (John 1:14). Glory is the theme of the wedding at Cana (2:1-11) and of the subsequent signs, symbols and teaching of Jesus' public ministry (John 2-12). This glory reaches its climax on the cross, where Jesus glorifies God by revealing the full extent of God's love for the world and by bringing about life through death; he is himself "glorified" by God through the cross, which, as a ladder of ascent to the realm of glory, represents his exaltation (13:31-32; 17:1-5). The characters of the fourth gospel respond to this divine radiance by either turning towards, or turning against, the light. Mary Magdalene's story reflects the major themes of the gospel and exemplifies, in particular, that painful though life-giving "turning" towards the Author of life.

The narrative of John 20 is structured around the giving of the Spirit by the risen Christ on the evening of Easter day (20:12-23). As the passion narrative begins in a garden (18:1-1), so the setting for the first resurrection appearance is likewise a garden

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(19:41), with its overtones of Paradise renewed (cf. Gen. 2:8-3:24).[1] On each side of this central scene, we see representatives of the believing community struggling to reach Easter faith – in particular, Mary Magdalene (20:1-18) and Thomas (20:24-29), both of whom are drawn into the orbit of the Spirit to become key witnesses to the resurrection.[2] The other disciples also are drawn towards Easter faith, including the Beloved Disciple and Peter, whose brief though puzzling narrative (20:3-10) is not elucidated until John 21. The narrative ends with what many have seen as the original ending of the fourth gospel (20:30-31), which summarizes the evangelical purpose of the gospel.[3] Mary Magdalene first appears in John's gospel at the foot of the cross, where, with the other holy women and the Beloved Disciple, she witnesses the death of Jesus (19:25).[4] Thus in John 20 she is already established as a woman of faith. Despite the reference to "we" in verse 2, Mary is alone in her visit to the tomb.[5] The arrival of Peter and the Beloved Disciple (20:3-10) does nothing to solve Magdalene's problem of where to find Jesus' body. We know already that the Beloved Disciple has a unique relationship to Jesus (cf. 13:23-26; 19:26-27, 35) and that he believes more than Peter, but what that "more" is we do not yet know.[6] From v. 11 onwards, Mary moves from one sign to another, until finally she recognizes Jesus' identity (20:16) and is commissioned to proclaim the resurrection (20:18).

Turning towards suffering and death

Magdalene's story of coming to Easter faith involves the notion of "turning" on a number of levels. In the first place, Mary turns towards suffering and death. Although at this stage of the narrative she misunderstands and searches for a corpse instead of a living being, she begins her search in the right place: at the tomb where the body of Jesus has been sumptuously laid by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea (19:38-42). After the departure of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, we find her weeping outside the tomb (20:11); unlike them, she does not go home but rather continues her search. It is this willingness to remain in the place of sorrow and to articulate the pain of the believing-yet-doubting community that finally leads her to the joy and hope of Easter (16:21-22; 19:34). Not unlike the Samaritan woman (4:7-42), Mary Magdalene persists in her search, without letting go, without disowning the pain.

There is an important spirituality embedded in this Johannine narrative. The first step in turning towards God is knowing the reality of ourselves. Christianity is not an escape from the "real world"; on the contrary, it is a definite turning to the world (cf. John 3:16-17; 17:15).[7] The journey of faith is a Lenten journey – the movement is from suffering and death to hope and joy. Without turning to face the one, we cannot encounter the other; in Calvin's words, "without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God".[8] Yet self-knowing is also divine gift as well as human struggle: "without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self".[9] In John's gospel, it is the Revealer who reveals both divine and human knowledge to the one who is "thirsty" for life (4:13-14; 7:37-39).[10] Such knowledge is spiritual, but it encompasses every aspect of our lives: spiritual and material, soul and body, sexual, psychological, personal, political. And because it is ultimately a divine gift, this knowing springs from love, not judgmentalism or harsh moralism. It leads to a self-acceptance that (paradoxically) makes possible both self- and social transformation.

We too need to turn to the place of pain, no matter how dark and terrible it seems. Like Mary Magdalene's, our grief, as persons and as community, is something to be

faced. Those of us who live in a context of Western affluence find this perhaps more difficult than others. Access to entertainment and consumerism, medication for the merest hint of pain, institutions and structures which push to the boundaries all that is bruised and disabled, funeral customs that are disembodied and cursory – all these can shield us from the pain of what it means to be human. If we are to "turn to God" and pursue the journey of Mary Magdalene, our sister in faith, we need like her to turn towards suffering and death: on the one hand, to reach down to what lies within – the bruised soul that is buried alive; on the other hand, to reach out to what lies without – the suffering that is pushed to the margins of our world.

Turning towards the Living One

Secondly, through turning towards pain and death, Mary Magdalene ultimately turns towards the Living One.[11] Her physical movement towards the risen Christ is symbolic of an inner turning; it represents a metamorphosis.[12] In this turning, she moves through grief and longing towards the joy and hope awaiting her. In turning to face Jesus, she responds as one who has lost, searched and finally found (cf. Song of Songs 3:1-4).[13] Mary recognizes the beloved voice of the Shepherd,[14] and his authority (*exousia*) as Sovereign One (*Kyrios*) to lay down his life and take it up again (10:1-18); and she responds with the intimate term "*Rabbouni*" (20:16), expressing her love for Jesus as well as understanding of his teaching.[15] And in being granted this Christophany, Mary is commissioned to proclaim the resurrection to the community (v. 18a),[16] in relation both to Jesus' ascension and the establishing of a new, covenant community.[17] As representative of the community of faith, Magdalene prepares the reader for the giving of the Spirit in the next scene, in which Jesus' ascension is completed.

Such movement, however, is not made without struggle. Rather than gliding effortlessly across the abyss that separates life and death, Magdalene reels awkwardly, disoriented, in a divergence that (paradoxically) leads her from death to life. Like other characters in the fourth gospel, she misses the significance of the signs that point to a deeper, symbolic meaning: the removal of the stone and emptiness of the tomb (20:1), the appearance of two angels replacing the body of Jesus (20:12), the questioning of the cause of her grief (20:13,15) and the advent of the Risen One, whom Magdalene mistakes for the gardener (20:14-15). Even when she recognizes Jesus (20:16), she misunderstands his presence. Not yet understanding the descent of the Spirit, she interprets his appearance eschatologically in wholly realized terms. The words "Do not hold onto me" (20:17) turn her instead towards the covenant community,[18] the locus of the Spirit, and its role of witnessing in an unsympathetic and often alien environment.[19] Jesus' permanent "abiding" (*menein*) is to be in the Spirit who vivifies the life of the flesh (6:63; 20:22).[20]

At each point, Mary moves closer and closer to what she seeks. Misunderstanding, in the end, leads her to understanding. In John's gospel mistaken turnings are part of the journey of faith – except in those who close themselves against the revelation. In the accounts of the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), the man born blind (9:1-41) and Martha of Bethany (11:1-44), misunderstanding linked to openness of heart transforms creaturely existence; the flesh becomes the medium for divine glory. In the fourth gospel, it takes growth and maturation to make this journey; and growth signifies a dynamic process, an ability to learn from mistakes, a refusal to be paralyzed by

guilt and fear. In this sense, conversion is life-long, a constant turning back and turning towards. The characters of the fourth gospel never ultimately grasp the one to whom they turn (1:18, 6:46); yet in that turning, again and again, they enter more fully into the incarnate glory of God, they receive the commission to abide in love and to be sent out to reap the harvest (4:35-38; 20:21). From the deepest and darkest places, they bear witness to the light.

For us, too, turning towards God can mean misleading pathways and wrong turnings. Yet paradoxically the very mistakes we make can take us – even if it seems like a tortuous and thorny path – to where we want to go. As in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, there is no short-cut to the garden of bliss and love; we must take the long road that passes through hell and purgatory, through pain and misunderstanding. As the church and as individuals we walk the stony path towards God, a journey made in the company of both heaven and earth; with all creation, we are engaged in moving towards the one who is sovereign over life and death.

God's turning towards the world

Thirdly, Mary Magdalene's movement towards the one who is crucified and risen is dependent on God's prior movement towards the world (3:16). Magdalene's turning to the risen Christ – and the church's turning to its Source – is predicated on the prevenient grace of the one who has first turned in love towards her.[21] Although Magdalene's story has the literary characteristics of a "recognition-story" (where a disciple fails to recognize the Easter Jesus until he does or says something familiar[22]), it can also be seen as a biblical "call narrative": a story in which God takes the initiative in calling an individual to prophetic or apostolic ministry (e. g. Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1:4-10, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11). Whatever else we say about Mary Magdalene's search – her initiative, determination, persistence, longing – this story is, at a more fundamental level, about God's searching for her, God's call, God's commission to proclaim the Easter message.[23] Behind Magdalene's tearful yet joyful turning is the prior and archetypal turning of *God*.

In John's gospel, this divine revolution is expressed in terms of the incarnation. Though the darkness has never been overpowered – or comprehended – by the light (*katalambanein*, 1:5), God has turned towards the world in the person of Jesus in a revolutionary way.[24] God has become human, entering into the human condition, into the vivid and material life of creation: immortal turned to mortal, Creator to creation, spirit to matter, eternal to ephemeral. The divine Word is now "bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh" (Gen. 2:23). The divine glory which is both protological ("in the beginning", John 1:1) and eschatological ("at the last day", John 11:24) flames into the present moment, shimmering in the ordinariness and vulnerability of human flesh.

The incarnation in John's gospel is the place to which the needle-point of the compass always turns, the centre and living heart of faith.[25] Creation is forever sanctified in this divine act of turning; matter is exalted, mortal flesh made radiant. Mary Magdalene turns to God because God first turns to her. And, like her, the community of faith down through the ages turns to face the one who already faces us, who has already turned from enmity and alienation, whose loving circle embraces us on every side, meeting us face-to-face in eternal graciousness and love.

Yet the incarnation does not stand without the cross and resurrection; the divine turning to humanity is also a turning to mortality. Human nature – indeed all created

reality – is both verified and transfigured in the events of Easter. There is a direct line running from incarnation to passion, death and new life. The Good Shepherd not only guides, nurtures, knows and protects the flock, but also loves the sheep through death to life (John 10:17-18). In turning towards humanity and creation, the incarnate Word also embraces mortality. As his distress at the tomb of Lazarus suggests (11:33-38), Jesus himself turns to face death and walks the sorrowful way, loving his own to the end (13:1).[26] At the same time, imprisoned within the blackness of the tomb and descending into the pits of hell (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19), Jesus turns from thence to life. Whereas human beings invariably turn away from death, Jesus is able to move freely towards it, because he has divine authority over life and death. He turns from death to life as well as from life to death, revealing his true identity as the sovereign one, the resurrection and the life, the one who shares the being of God. Thus Mary Magdalene turns to Jesus only because, through incarnation, death and resurrection, God in Christ has turned towards her; it is not a passive turning, however, for God has actively turned death on its head, transforming "mortal trash" into "immortal diamond".[27]

God's inner turning

Fourthly, the notion of divine turning – in this case, of God towards humanity, of Creator towards creation – expresses what is already intrinsic to the divine nature. God is already turning within Godself.[28] The evangelist first suggests this graceful inward turning in the opening verses of the fourth gospel. Most English versions use the preposition "with" to translate the Greek preposition *pros*, because its literal meaning, at least in classical Greek, seems awkward and clumsy: literally, "the Word was towards God" (1:1); "He was in the beginning towards God" (1:2). We might paraphrase: "the Word was turned towards God".[29] At the end of the Prologue, the same idea is expressed in a different phrase: "God the only Son who lies in (the Greek preposition *eis* is used) the Father's embrace" (1:18). The imagery is that of two people in intimate relationship, each endlessly turning towards the other, as lovers do at the beginning and end of the day.[30] To be eternally "turned towards" is an expression of the most profound intimacy and connection.[31] What Jesus does in the fourth gospel is to draw the believing community into the same circle, the same "turning towards", the same covenant relationship of mutuality and intimacy.[32] Here the notion of turning suggests not a static union – like two statues facing each other – but rather a dynamic circumfluence, an encompassing of one within the other, twining in and out, like the steps of a dance.[33]

Turning towards community

There is one final sense of turning in Magdalene's story in John's gospel, though the verb itself is not used. After the Christophany, Magdalene turns back to the community with the commission she has been given: the message of the risen one. Her words of faithful witness, "I have seen the Lord" (20:18), ring out in joy and hope beyond the pages of the gospel. It is a cry of faith, an unheard-of exultation in the midst of grief and pain. It represents the community's call to mission, to bear witness to the love of God in our life together and in our commitment to those who are poor, exploited, disabled. The call to mission is also a turning towards creation, a creation threatened by greed and exploitation; to rediscover the perception of Christ at the

heart of all reality – each land and culture, each living creature, each flower and blade of grass:

> Thou art the joy of all joyous things,
> Thou art the light of the beam of the sun,
> Thou art the door of the chief of hospitality,
> Thou art the surpassing star of guidance,
> Thou art the step of the deer of the hill,
> Thou art the step of the steed of the plain,
> Thou art the grace of the swan of swimming,
> Thou art the loveliness of all lovely desires.[34]

In the end, God turns us towards one another and towards creation, with the same song of joy and hope on our lips. We are turned in love to the world because it is the place of God's dwelling, the lands of God's ancient dreaming. We turn to face its beauty and terror, its grace and suffering. Without this turning to creation, our lives are self-defeating, an ineffectual revolving on the one spot, a renouncing of what God has made and what God has become. With Mary Magdalene, we are called to share in the mission of the Living God whose purpose is the union and communion of all things in Christ (17:21-23).

Conclusion

The story of Mary Magdalene's search at the tomb is an elaborate narrative of turning. The conversion to Easter faith which Mary experiences – her Johannine role as witness to the resurrection – represents the movement from grief and despair to hope and joy. That movement is made possible only by her willingness to face the darkness of the tomb, and to seek the Christ of her longing with persistence and courage. This complex interaction of turning is itself dependent, as we have seen, on a deeper and prior turning: that of God towards the world in the incarnation, facing suffering and death, transforming death into life. It is the Word-made-flesh who brings to birth the community of faith – the one who is eternally turned towards the divine presence. In this sense, turning has to do with communion and intimacy; it is a key image unlocking the meaning of salvation. As the church, hearing the echo of that distant apostolic cry, we too participate in the steps of the dance, sharing the journey towards God with all creation: the painful yet ecstatic turning from darkness to light, from death to life.

Coda: a meditation on turning

This meditation is not intended as historical reconstruction, but rather as imaginative entry into the text of John 20:1-18, using the character of Mary Magdalene. It is written from the perspective of an Anglo-Celtic woman living in the Southern Hemisphere – in an ancient land whose peoples loved the earth of their Dreaming and whose ancient ways were ravaged by European colonization.

After the sabbath day, I stand in the garden outside the cave, turned to the darkness and the open mouth where no stone protects me. Just as I stood on the bald hill, only three days ago, beside the cross. A life-time ago, an aeon, an eternity of disbelieving. There in that hour I saw the glory, the priceless cloth, the presence of the mother, the open wound which is also a womb, the life pouring through. Bleeding in the darkness on the holy day. The red glow of pain which is also life: breathing in and out, giving and letting go, surrendering the spirit.

Unquestionably a glorious death, suffused in love, vibrant yet terrible. We gathered around in a small group, our sole companion the disciple he loved who chose to stay, not with the others – his companions – but with us the mourning women. There was grief and pain, but the breath of the dying man fell upon us: passion, tenderness, confidence, holding us to the end.

And then the burial which I watched, hiding like Miriam in the bushes of the garden, guarding what lay in rivers of blood. The great ones came to exclaim, to gather up, to wrap around and around. They bustled about, bringing gifts for his body. It was too late for them, of course, but they scorned renown and poured their wealth instead on his feet, his hands, his burning wounds. A turn-around indeed, I told myself in astonishment. A burial fit for a king; the fragile body cradled in myrrh, fragrance to shield an alien truth.

But here today in this garden I see only emptiness and loss. That which was present is absent. I face the emptiness of the vault which is nevertheless terrifyingly full; the stench of death, the soft corruptible flesh ending all my dreams, the dry bones, the fine dust poured on the earth like a libation. The very beauty and tranquillity of this garden offends; sublimely indifferent to crypt and cross, to ugliness and desolation. The tall, slender trees, the tangled blossom, everywhere the amber air fragrant with wattle and eucalypt. The chime of currawong and bellbird, as if in exultation. Yet to me all this no more than a fierce reminder of Paradise forever lost. Why couldn't this place be a desert, a burning centre far from water that only the ancient ones can trace? Or a wasteland of bruised rocks and trampled dreaming?

It is to my brothers that I first turn when, taking my courage in my hands, I peer into the gloom and find it emptier than I had imagined. Oh his body gone! Oh the sound of the lover's footsteps turning from the threshold! Nothing to touch or hold onto; no fleshly consolation. My brothers come to my aid but they do not help me. They run and clamber to see what I have seen – perhaps see more – but speak no word of healing. They turn away in silence and I am again alone, the tears blinding me, washing down my skin like the breaking of drought. All my pain, all the pain of the world, from the beginning of time until now, lies in that dark cave; in that loss, in that denial even of the last consolation. Like the mothers of tortured sons, I beseech anyone who will listen for the lacerated, lifeless flesh to be given back; fruitless to anyone else, but all that is left to me. And people futilely question my tears and I have no defence, no strength to separate the sorrowful interior, no mask to convey a happiness and solidity that are not there.

And then it happens. A looming presence, a voice ringing in my ears; the syllables of my name, like a caress, coming from the dark stranger to whom I turn, the keeper of the garden. Suddenly I am awake and the darkness and grief coil like a snake in the daylight. The cave and its emptiness swirl away as if they no longer existed. All that I see is his presence, his bodily truth. And I hold him and touch the living flesh.

Yet it is not to be. Somehow I am confused, not yet awake, still half-dreaming. More words, more explanations and I find myself falling back in disbelief. But only for a moment. Only until I grasp the words, until the sign of his flesh and blood begins to make sense. Transfiguration, I realize, not a mere repetition of the old; the struggle still there but turning into his radiance, his shimmering life.

And when he tells me – when I learn I am to be the witness – I turn back across the doleful path I have trod twice today already. Running to proclaim to those I love, those without spirit. For the first time, I perceive that the earth itself is new, though it turns on its axis from light into darkness. The soft autumnal glow, the warm days, the stately branches refusing to shed their foliage merely because the winter comes. Stones, grass, trees, flowers, fecund and suffused with life, triumphantly meeting the cold and dark. The days and nights turn, the seasons turn, the whole earth turns. And, in harmony with all creation, I too turn: towards the source, the fountainhead, the sun stealing over the eastern rim.

Behind me the cave is bare, the walls streaked with signs and pictures formed from clay. A sacred site where long-dead ancestors traced their dwelling. An icon not only of death but of life, its very emptiness a sign of hope. The womb, no longer barren, dazed from giving birth; a sanctuary of love, a shelter in the coming night. I am born, I am new, the fresh wind fills my mouth, my limbs, my soul. I am turned round and around like a spinning-top. How beautiful the feet that run and dance, the feet that were clenched so recently in birth-pains, bearing down and down into the darkness! And now light, and now hope; now a garden and a harvest sown; now a gospel to proclaim.

NOTES

[1] N. Wyatt, "'Supposing him to be the gardener' (John 20,15). A Study of the Paradise Motif in John", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 81, 1990, pp.21-38.

[2] See D.A. Lee, "Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 58, 1995, pp.37-49. The more usual structure divides John 20:1-18 into two episodes, e.g. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, New York, Doubleday, 1966, II, pp.965,995, and R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, London, Burns & Oates, 1982-86, III, pp.301-302.

[3] Further on the ending to John's gospel, see Brown, *op. cit.*, II, pp.1057-1061. On the possible literary connections between John 20 and 21, cf. C.H. Talbert, *Reading John*, London, SPCK, 1992, p.248, and S.M. Schneiders, "John 21:1-14", *Interpretation*, vol. 43, 1989, pp.70-75.

[4] On the role of Mary Magdalene in Western iconography, see S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen. Myth and Metaphor*, London, Harper Collins, 1993. On her high Johannine status, see T. Okure, "The Significance of Jesus' Commission to Mary Magdalene", *International Review of Mission*, vol. 81, 1992, pp.177-88, and J. Neyrey, *The Resurrection Stories*, Delaware, Michael Glazier, 1988, pp.61-75.

[5] The "we" may well reflect an early tradition closer to the synoptic gospels (Mark 16:1-8/Matt. 28:1-10/ Luke 24:1-11); see Brown, *op. cit.*, II, pp.996-1000. On the pre-history of the narrative, see Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, III, pp.302-307.

[6] Verses 8-9 are notoriously difficult. Does the Beloved Disciple reach full faith (e. g. Brown, *op. cit.*, II, 987-88), or is his faith still partial (so P. Minear, "'We don't know where ...' John 20.2", *Interpretation*, vol. 30, 1976, pp.127-28)? Could it be that the narrative is deliberately ambiguous?

[7] For John's complex use of the term "world" (*kosmos*), see C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed., London, SPCK, 1978, pp.161-62.

[8] J.T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1960, I.1.1.

[9] *Ibid.*, I.1.2.

[10] See R. Bultman, *The Gospel of John*, trans. by G Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. and J.K. Riches, general eds, Oxford, Blackwell, 1971, pp.187-88.

[11] On this non-gender specific title for God in Scripture, see G. Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1995, pp.47-58.

[12] The text implies that, after first turning towards Jesus (20:14), Magdalene turns away before finally facing him (20:16); see B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981, p.606.

[13] Okure, *op. cit.*, p.181.

[14] E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, London, SCM, 1983, 1994, p.333.

[15] Okure, *op. cit.*, p.181, argues that the term "Rabbouni" is affectionate; against this, cf. Brown, *op. cit.*, II, pp.991-992,1010.

[16] Okure, *op. cit.*, p.185. On Magdalene's "quasi-apostolic" role, see R.E. Brown, "The Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel", in *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, New York, Paulist, 1979, pp.189-90; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *op. cit.*, pp. 326,332-33; and M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, p.225; also G. R. O'Day, "John" in C.A. Newsom & S.H. Ringe, eds, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, London, SPCK, 1992, pp.301-302, and S.M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church", *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, vol. 12, 1982, p.43.

[17] The term *adelphoi* (literally, "brothers") is likely to be inclusive here, rather than being a narrow reference to the Twelve.

[18] On the covenant theme (Jer. 31:33, Ezek. 37:28, Ruth 1:16), see E. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, London, Faber & Faber, 1947, II, p.647, and Brown, *op. cit.*, II, pp.1016-17.

[19] The words "Do not touch me" are difficult (20:17; cf. 20:27). The present tense, however, suggests ongoing activity: "do not go on holding me"; so Barrett, *op. cit.*, p.565, and Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, III, p.318.

[20] O'Day, *op. cit.*, p.302.

[21] See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1936-1960, II.1, pp.353-58; II.2, pp.3-93,557-59, IV.1, pp.157-210, IV.1, pp.8-52, and IV.4, pp.33-36.

[22] E. g. Luke 24:13-35 and John 21:1-14; see J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, pp.507-508.

[23] The same verb (*strephein*) is used of Jesus in the opening episode (1:38) in a symbolic context that sets out the symbolic meaning of discipleship (1:35-40).

[24] John's gospel has a strong sense of continuity with Judaism, but it is interpreted in christological terms: the Johannine Jesus is "the personification and universalization" of Israel's ancient symbols; cf. F.J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1996, p.205.

[25] For this reading of John, see, e.g. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, London, SCM, 1958, II, pp.40-49; M.M. Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1988; and J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, London, SCM, 1990, pp.239-245; against this, cf. E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, London, SCM, 1968.

[26] For this reading of Jesus' distress at the tomb, see B.J. Byrne, *Lazarus*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 1990, pp.57-60, and D.A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, pp.208-12.

[27] "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection", in W.H. Gardner, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose*, London, Penguin Books, 1953.

[28] See C.M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, New York, Harper-Collins, 1991, esp. pp.234-317, P. Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983, chap. 5, and D. Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, Sydney, St Paul's, 1995), pp.91-110.

[29] For this translation see I. de la Potterie, "L'emploi de *eis* dans Saint Jean et ses incidences théologiques", in *Biblica*, vol. 43, 1962, pp.366-87, and F.J. Moloney, "'In the Bosom of' or 'Turned towards' the Father?" *Australian Biblical Review*, vol. 31, 1983, pp.63-71. Against this, cf. Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, I, p.234.

[30] A similar translation is "face-to-face with God"; see L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1971, pp.75-76.

[31] In the Wisdom tradition, which has influenced John's Christology, Sophia (Lady Wisdom) is the pre-existing and intimate companion of God (see Prov. 8:27-31; Wis. 7:25-26, 8:3-4, 9:4, Sirach 1:1, 24:3-5, 9); see E.A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York, Crossroad, 1992, esp. pp. 86-100.

[32] This is linked especially to the Johannine imagery of "abiding"; so D.A. Lee, "Abiding in the Fourth Gospel: A Case-Study in Feminist Biblical Theology", in D.A. Lee & M. Porter, eds, *Feminist Theology: The Next Stage*, in *Pacifica*, vol. 10, 1997, pp.123-36.

[33] On John of Damascus' notion of *perichoresis* (Greek *perichorein*, "to encompass"; Latin *circumincessio*), see LaCugna, *op. cit.*, pp.270-78.

[34] Alexander Carmichael, ed., *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations*, Edinburgh, Floris Books, 3.

The Assembly Theme as a Missionary Call

Gerhard Linn

Compared with the themes of the previous WCC assemblies, that of the eighth assembly in Harare is unique. The Amsterdam assembly in 1948 met under a "heading" that reflected the specific situation and mood of the period of reconstruction after the second world war. The themes of the following assemblies from Evanston (1954) to Vancouver (1983) were christological affirmations, whilst the theme of the most recent assembly, in Canberra (1991), was a prayer. This time the assembly will be marked by a *call*, by a surprising combination of two imperatives.

I have to admit that I do not like imperatives as a conference theme, because I do not like taking orders very much. An assembly theme should be convincing – and inviting, and so I ask: can this theme be heard as an invitation? Perhaps the combination of the two calls can help us perceive the theme as an invitation. Yet this combination of calls is anything but self-evident. Why should a turning around, a totally new direction in life, lead to joy in hope? Did those who phrased the theme assume that turning to God is a precondition for *real* hope, and therefore for joy?

Both parts of the theme, both imperatives have their specific references in the New Testament, the second part even as a direct quotation. I suppose that those who chose "Turn to God" had the summary of Jesus' first preaching in mind:

> The Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1:15).

It is of crucial importance to know that Jesus does not begin his preaching with an imperative, but with an affirmation – an indicative. And when one first hears such a liberating, exciting affirmation, one can better hear the following imperative as a consequence of the affirmation, that is as something positive – or even as an invitation.

I have been asked to write an essay on the mission of the church in the light of the assembly theme. On reading the letter I said to myself: this is an interesting assignment. The editors of this journal obviously suppose that the imperative "Turn to God" is a missionary call – a call to repent, a call to conversion. And many Christians take it for granted that this is just what mission and evangelism are all about: to call people to conversion. Many might remember their experiences with an evangelistic campaign in which they participated. They might remember – with mixed feelings – the urging and reproaching tone of the evangelist's speech, and the hidden (and sometimes open)

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expression of a threat: do not miss this chance of conversion, of turning to God *now* – it might be your last one!

Because of this possible connotation, I am happy with the surprising combination of the two imperatives. I hear the call "Turn to God"; yet immediately after it, before I have time to perceive it as a threatening admonition, I hear the second part of the theme: "Rejoice in Hope". And this gives to the whole theme an encouraging and inviting character.

"Rejoice in Hope" is a direct quotation from Romans 12:12. There it is part of a whole list of admonitions, as is typical of this part of St Paul's letter to the Romans. After the dogmatic reflections in chapters 1-8 and 9-11, Paul deals from chapter 12 on with ethical implications of the Christian faith, with the daily practice of faith. The whole structure of the letter underlines this pattern: first the indicative, first the praise of God's saving initiative, since we are all first receivers of God's grace before we are expected to respond. Even in the beginning of Romans chapter 12, Paul underlines this crucial sequence by starting his ethical reflections with the phrase "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God". Or as Thomas Best in his article on the Harare theme underlines: "Our turning to God is rooted in the reality of God's antecedent act: we turn – we can turn – because God has first turned to us."[1]

May I repeat: I am happy that the combination of the biblical imperative can help us to avoid the undertone of warning, or even threat, and enable us to use the Harare theme with joy and conviction: God *has turned* to us, so that we can turn to God without fear, but with joy!

I should like now to reflect on the assembly theme in the light of the specific missionary challenges we face in the Eastern part of Germany. There are, of course, hundreds of different audiences whom we may have to address in communicating the good news of God's all-embracing love and grace. Yet in Germany we face two fundamentally different situations. In the Western part of our country – in spite of all the decline in church membership – the majority belong to one of the Christian churches, most of them either to the Roman Catholic or to the mainstream Protestant church. Many persons might have lost direct contact with their church; but because of their religious education in school, their preparation for confirmation and some casual participation in church services, they have at least a memory, a minimum of understanding of what faith and religion are about. For a missionary approach one can apply the message of Jesus' parable of the two sons in Luke 15: one can aim at a "return", like that of the second son. And the second son *can risk returning*, as he still remembers that there is a father who loves him and who will not reject him. But in the Eastern part of Germany, for eighty percent of the population the question of a *re*-turn to God – and to the church – is quite irrelevant, for any contact with the Christian faith, the Bible, or any Christian community has simply not been part of their life story. The communists failed with their repressive experiment of the socialist society and a strictly state controlled economy; but they did not fail with their efforts to de-Christianize society along with its culture and value-systems.

In 1970, the communist world celebrated Lenin's 100th birthday. My son was in first grade at school when the teacher told the pupils the biography of Lenin. She mentioned the fate of Lenin's brother, who was involved as an anarchist in an assassination attempt against the Czar, and was arrested, sentenced to death and finally executed. A girl asked the teacher: "What is that, executed?" Before the teacher could

answer, my son stood up and said: "I know what it is. It is like with Jesus. Jesus was executed. He was crucified." Then another child asked "Who is Jesus? Was he also a brother of Lenin?"

This shows that already 28 years ago, in many towns in East Germany, Christian children were in a desperate minority in their school classes. Nowadays we have many possibilities to communicate the gospel to people who do not know who Jesus was, and is. When we try to use these possibilities, we cannot refer to a memory, a minimum of understanding of what the Christian message is. We must reckon with a *total lack* of such a knowledge. When teachers with their classes visit as part of our "cultural heritage" an old Gothic church – something which would never have happened before 1990 – both teacher and pupils often raise questions like, "Who is this dead man there on the cross? What is this vessel [a baptismal font] for? Is it meant to spit in?" What a challenge this poses to explain the essentials of our faith in an understandable and inviting way!

When it is only a matter of lack of knowledge, we can try to respond to a natural curiosity and convey a basic idea of what our faith can mean for life. Yet often the lack of knowledge is linked to prejudice, to the belief that one knows quite well what faith or religion is: namely a dangerous superstition, invented and imposed by those once in power in earlier centuries in order to keep the working people obedient and quiet. It is extremely difficult to overcome such prejudice, to open ears, and minds, and hearts of people who were influenced for decades by this prejudice, in order that they may understand that there is a loving God who offers the chance for all – religious and agnostic people alike – to turn around, to make a new start, to risk taking a new and meaningful direction for their life.

Once a year – on Christmas Eve – we have a special chance to preach the gospel to thousands of people who come to church only this one evening in the entire year. On Christmas Eve 1997 the local pastor of my own congregation found, I think, an appropriate way to speak to those who come to a Christian service this one evening. Her text was Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all."

In the German Bible translation which she used, "grace" is translated by the word "kindness": the kindness of God has appeared. She began her sermon with an experience one member of her current confirmation class had had at school. Some days before Christmas a teacher had argued against the Christmas story, telling the class that this story of the birth of Jesus is nothing more than a fairy-tale and saying that one should be careful not to be influenced by such a fairy-tale, since it is a dangerous story which hinders people from becoming fit for "real" daily life. The preacher then raised the question: Why should the Christmas story be dangerous? And what kind of "fitness for life" did that teacher have in mind, so that she argued against Christmas? The Christmas story allows us to know, to realize, that we celebrate the birth of Jesus because in him God's grace, God's kindness has appeared. We all know how important kindness is for our daily life. How grateful we are when in state offices, in shops, in the neighbourhood, and – most importantly – at our working place we can experience the kindness of other people. The experience of kindness enables us to endure difficulties and disappointments; and how terrible is our life when there is no kindness in it at all.

God is a God who is kind to us, full of patience and love. He has turned to us in Jesus, and invites us all to "turn to him" again and again. The preacher went on to

refer to the pressure experienced during the time of preparation for Christmas, especially by housewives who feel responsible for the success of the family Christmas celebration. How afraid they are of failing in their efforts, and then missing the kindness of the other family members which they so long for! At this moment one could see in the pews that many women nodded, and showed their agreement: Yes, so it is. Then the preacher continued: God in his kindness is tolerant with our failures and weaknesses; He does not expect us to be perfect. God is the one who tempers justice with mercy. This is the message of Christmas, and therefore it is right to say: the Christmas story is not dangerous. On the contrary, it helps us to gain a certain fitness for life. It enables us to be kind to others, as we are sure to receive the kindness of God.

This summary of the Christmas Eve sermon in my congregation is an example of how, when people come to us, we can convey the great invitation implied in the Harare theme. Yet the occasions when people who have no historical contact with the Christian community come to hear the biblical message are very rare. Instead of waiting for people to come to us, we have to go to them. Mission means *going to* other people, meeting them where they live, listening to their needs and aspirations, trying to understand how they perceive life. Before proclaiming the call "Turn to God" as Christian communities, we have to turn to others around us. It is not enough to keep our church buildings open during the week for all kinds of visitors (although even that is an important step): we have to visit people in their homes. Some congregations have groups of volunteers who do such visits. Their job is not easy. They have to ring many bells before they find a door where a person or a family welcomes them, so that a first encounter can take place. But when it comes to such encounters or even to a dialogue, those doing the visiting can experience how they are challenged with their faith, and can grow in their faith as it is put to the test.

In addition to this literal "going to" others, there is also an indirect way of going, as long as the agenda of the congregation includes the concerns of the population at large. Christians and others alike need to comprehend the social structures and order of our society, and to see through the mechanisms of the so-called market economy. Everyone needs orientation. And Christian communities have the potential to provide platforms for common searching and learning, to arrange, for example, parish seminars where, in the process of coping with life problems, new insights can be reached and the supportive capacity of faith can be shared.

Many congregations in the Eastern part of Germany are tempted to remain small, and to be satisfied with self-affirmation as "a holy remnant". There is an urgent need to overcome the fear of crossing the thresholds (*Schwellenangst*) of buildings which, during the period of repression, were symbols of the official hostility against Christians (places such as schools, the town-hall, public institutions) – while others, outside the church, hesitate to cross the thresholds of a church building.

There is a need for whole congregations to be addressed by the Harare theme – to "turn to God", and to "rejoice in hope" – as is emphasized in the chapter on conversion of the *Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism* (1982): "The call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation".[2]

To respond to this need many local church councils, together with other volunteers, are engaged in a self-survey where such critical questions as the following are dealt with:

How can people in our congregation experience that it is true that God loves them? How can people in our congregation experience that, with their gifts, they are needed, that they count, that their needs and concerns are shared by others?

We comprehend more and more how essential it is that people who happen to come to a church group, or to a particular event like a festive gathering, are invited "to join in playing with others", to be welcomed as partners in the "game".

In my childhood, when our house in Berlin was destroyed during the war I had several times to change where I lived. Different relatives provided a home for me for a certain, sometimes rather short, period. At each new place I asked myself: who are the children in my neighbourhood? Will they allow me to join them and play with them? In most cases this was not a big problem (as long as the aunt who was then hosting me would not forbid me to have contacts with "those" children!). But whenever I found children who accepted me as a partner in their games, I was happy.

In congregations it seems to be far more difficult to get this chance to "join the game", to be accepted as an active partner – a chance which implies the experience of being welcome, of counting, of belonging. Many jobless people suffer not only because of the loss of income, but because of the impression that no one needs them. During the consultation at Lutherstadt Wittenberg co-sponsored by the WCC and the Evangelical Church of the Union in October 1997, a meeting dedicated to the mission of the church in secularized societies in Europe, we listened to the outcry of an unemployed woman which culminated in the question: "Why does nobody need me?" During this consultation Heino Falcke offered the vision of a church where everybody has the chance to participate (*Beteiligungskirche*).

This does not mean that God simply wants us to fulfil people's longings. Some of those longings can be very egocentric. To participate as a member in the body of Christ implies change, turning around, and turning to God, whose love is directed at me and at others as well – including those I am not in sympathy with. When Jesus called the Twelve he called people to join his companionship who were of such different social, religious and political backgrounds that they never would have come together if Jesus had not called them. By calling them together Jesus demanded much of them, in terms of changing their attitudes towards each other. To "turn to God" implies turning to other people, even to people whom I find hard to live with. Congregations which receive asylum seekers, or welcome homeless people in their midst, often face serious conflicts amongst their faithful members. Such conflicts can be painful, yet in many cases they lead to a better understanding of what God's promise and will for God's people is.

I should like to underline one final aspect of the missionary dimension of the Harare theme – the aspect of "common witness". During the time of communist repression, our children – suffering under the intolerance and efforts at indoctrination of their teachers who followed "the party line" – learned to consider as unimportant the question whether a fellow student was Catholic or Protestant. The essential question was: are you a Christian? And when someone from "outside" was interested to join a group of Christians, it did not matter what confessional affiliation that group had. Young Protestants would rejoice when they learned that a class-mate had joined a Catholic group and met Jesus Christ in that group, and vice versa. What is it that is still separating us? It cannot be something essential.

We pray that God will help us keep the liberating experience of the time when a wall was built to hinder the citizens of the German Democratic Republic from leaving their "homeland" alive. During that time we could see that the affirmation of Psalm 18:29 is right: "By my God, I can leap over a wall". This was true then at least of the wall that separated the different confessional branches of Christ's church, and later it became true also of the ugly wall that separated the two "ideological blocs". We can rejoice when someone meets Christ and turns to God in a Christian community which is named differently from ours, as long as we acknowledge each other as a branch of the one church.

We are called to "rejoice in hope". This is possible if we "turn to God", as sure as nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37), and nothing is impossible for those who believe (Matt. 17:20).

In brief: despite its imperative character, I am happy with the theme of the eighth assembly. It inspires reflection, and that is no small matter.

NOTES

[1] "'Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope': An Approach to the Theme of the Eighth Assembly of the WCC", *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, July 1996, p.405.

[2] *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, 1982, para. 13.

Facing an Unknown Future

Turning to the God of Grace

Marchiene Vroon Rienstra

"Turn to God." This exhortation is repeated over and over again in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures – most often at times of crisis in the life of the people of God. As the World Council of Churches prepares for its eighth assembly and the celebration of its 50th anniversary, it does so in the context of many crises throughout the world. Often these crises seem overwhelming, and the problems out of which they come insurmountable. The cry "Turn to God" is an acknowledgment of the failure of human imagination, skill, will and resources. It calls all the people of God back to the one Source of our life, and the only one able to deliver us and the world from the destructive and divisive forces of evil.

But who is this one to whom we are called to turn? To answer, "God, of course", is not enough. For the word "God" is a generic word – one which means many different things to different people. Even among Christians there are a great many concepts and images of God. Some of them are rooted in and shaped by Scripture. Others are (usually more unconsciously) rooted in and shaped by the various cultures in which Christians live. Still others are rooted in and shaped by the differing church traditions (also shaped by culture) in which Christians today find themselves.

To turn to God is not the same as turning to our limited concepts and mental images of God. I have, for instance, had some spirited discussions with self-proclaimed atheists. After asking them to describe the God they do not believe in, I reply that I don't believe in that God either. This usually shocks them, and they insist that the images and concepts of God they are rejecting are what they learned from the church, or from certain preachers, or from Christian friends and relatives. And I believe them. For there are many concepts of God "rattling around" in Christian circles of all kinds which are very far indeed from the God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Usually, such concepts are limited. God is seen in a decidedly Lutheran, or Baptist, or Calvinist, or Catholic manner. Or God is imaged in the likeness of certain cultures: African, European, Asian, Native American and so on. God is also often

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imagined as a male, usually a bearded father god dwelling somewhere in the sky. The trouble with all of these images is that those who hold them often do so half-consciously, and even when fully aware of them, limit their concept and image of God to what is familiar or comfortable for them.

Really to listen to the call "Turn to God" demands that we as the people of God first turn inward and discern what images of God we are harbouring in our minds and hearts. Are some of them idols that need to be smashed? Are we too attached to some of them? Are we willing to admit that whatever our images are, they are woefully limited and inadequate in the face of the unfathomable Divine Mystery named God? Are we willing to allow our images and concepts of God to be challenged, stretched and changed?

This must happen if we are going to turn to God together in all our diversity as God's people. We can no longer allow the differing images we harbour of God to keep us divided, or be used as an excuse for attack or oppression. We have much to repent of in this regard. Think of the horror of Christians marching off to battle against each other during the second world war, each side claiming that God was on their side. Think of the religious imperialism which imposed white Western ideas of God, many of them not rooted in the Bible, upon those who became Christians in China, India and many other non-white, non-Western lands. Think of the oppression of women justified by taking the maleness of God literally, and using it as a reason to exclude women from using their gifts and, even worse, to abuse them.

To turn to God authentically and in a saving way, all of us who name ourselves Christians must return to the wisdom of apophatic theology which comes from the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the earliest centuries of Christian thought. This wise way insists that whatever we say or imagine about God is at best only partial. We all "see through a glass darkly", as St Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13. All too often, we are quick to see this as true of every other theological view but our own. But we are all very limited, fallible human beings, and our interpretations of the Scriptures which are our common heritage are also very fallible and limited, as are our concepts and images of God. When we remember the unfathomable mystery of the one in whom we all live and move and have our being, we are much less likely to be so confident about our theological assertions about the nature of God.

The image evoked by the words "in whom we live and move and have our being" is that of a baby in its mother's womb. The baby is very close to its mother – inside her, in fact – and yet is very limited in the ways it can apprehend her. The same is true for us who live in God's womb. We are in the dark, so to speak, like a baby in the womb. Whatever we say that is true of God is also not true. This apophatic approach allows for the essential humility which precludes the arrogant assertion of any one Christian point of view as the whole truth about God. It makes room for turning to God at this crucial time in history with a keen sense of our limitations and an eagerness to discover more of who God is from one another. It encourages us to see our differences as sources of insight rather than reasons for division.

Beyond all our divisions is this wonderful truth about God which Christians have always affirmed: *God is love*. Because there is so much human confusion about what love is, the nature of this love has been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Christians are those who look to Jesus Christ as the image and likeness of God – the human expression of the nature of God, if you will. We all owe a common allegiance to the

one we have always called "Lord". We all declare our love and willingness to follow him by virtue of our common baptism. For us, to turn to God is to turn to the one who is revealed by and in Jesus Christ. We may have many different ways of understanding him and following him. But he is the measuring rod, the criterion by which we evaluate all claims about the nature of God. If they contradict what Jesus revealed God to be, we have good reason to reject them, no matter what authority they claim to have. On this we can be united, and it gives us a strong basis for turning to God in a way that puts us alongside each other rather than over against one another as we enter the new millennium.

Above all, to turn to God, who is love, as we confess, is to turn back to loving one another in the same way we are all loved by God in and through Jesus Christ.

This goes far beyond loving our neighbour "as ourselves". For the truth is that we often do not love ourselves very well, which then translates into not loving our neighbour very well. In fact, we simply do not know how to love truly except by believing and experiencing the love first given to us by God and revealed in Jesus Christ. "We love because he first loved us," says the apostle John.

It is difficult for us to experience divine love if we usually conceive of God as dwelling at a great distance from us. The spatial metaphors used in much of our religious language, hymnody and prayer shape our imaginations and souls far more deeply than we think. If we usually imagine God high on a throne, dwelling somewhere in the sky, far away, then to turn to God is to face a distant deity towards whom we travel on a long, long journey. If we remember that God is omnipresent, that God is with us and among us, that God's Spirit dwells in the deepest recesses of our being individually and in us corporately as the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, then to turn to God is also to turn to one another and to the depths of our own being. The festival of Pentecost which we celebrate every year reminds us that the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh. The three-personed God revealed to us in our holy book is a God who in-dwells persons. Christ comes to us, and we face him and turn to him in other persons – not least among them those who need a cup of cold water, clothes, comfort, release and healing.

Therefore, to turn to the God who is nearer to us than our own hearts, and as close as the people around us, is to open ourselves to an increasing awareness of the divine presence in us and others. This awareness bears the fruit of an ever greater attention to the love that upholds and guides us in every moment. It means that we recognize God's presence in one another as fully as in ourselves. We look into each other's eyes and faces for glimpses of Jesus Christ. Until this changes from a nice idea into a daily spiritual discipline, of course, it will have little effect. But its power as a spiritual practice is great enough to transform our relationships with one another as Christians. We will be deeply respectful, receptive and ready to cherish the multiple signs of Christ's presence we see in each other. We will turn our backs on our bad old habits of judging and separating ourselves from one another because of our differences. We will focus on the divine Person in the persons of one another, rather than on traditions, dogmas, doctrines and denominational structures that continue to divide us.

When we turn to God in this way, we necessarily cast a searching eye at whatever in ourselves and our particular Christian tradition is incompatible with the presence of Christ within and among us all. For these incompatibilities obscure Christ's presence, making it more difficult for other Christians to turn to God. And they often function as

logs in our eyes, blinding us to the presence and action of Christ in other members of the one body. All too often in the past, our focus has been on the faults or "specks in the eye" of our Christian sisters and brothers, rather than on how God is present in and through them. This applies to denominational as well as personal relations. Examples are easy to relate, but serve no purpose unless they motivate us not to repeat this sort of thing in the future.

We will repeat our mistakes, of course, unless we wholeheartedly turn to God for the grace to turn our backs on that which separates us. Because God is always turned towards us and is the one who alone can turn us around, we have hope that in spite of all our past failures, we can with St Paul forget the past and press forward towards the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That high calling certainly means pressing towards the holy unity of all Christians for which Christ prayed.

The ecumenical movement of which the World Council of Churches is such a vital expression has always realized how sinful and tragic Christian disunity has been and still is. Many, many people have never come to Christ because of the way Christians do not love one another. How can those who do not know God is love turn to God if we Christians do not do so – over and over again? How can we expect them to turn from shallow, culturally captive, egoistic, self-righteous, unjust living if we do not? How can we ask people to make peace in the light of serious mutual wounding if we do not? How can we preach justice if we practise injustice within our own communities?

The convincing witness to the world which we Christians need to bear is not that of perfection. We will never be perfectly loving, perfectly just or perfectly united. Rather, by turning to God, instead of focusing on our own and each other's failings, we allow God's strength and grace to be made manifest in our weakness. We bear witness to the fact that we need God's love as much as anyone, and that we trust that love to bind us together and heal the wounds we have inflicted on each other and on ourselves and the world. Others watching us can see that at least we are facing in the right direction and focusing on God rather than on each other's faults.

Psychologists tell us that what we focus on and pay attention to is what grows in power in our psyche and in our life. Think of the powerful change that would occur if we were to give our full attention to the face of God in one another. The moving story of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau reveals the possibilities. Jacob wrestles with the angel of God on the night before he is to meet Esau, whom he has deceived and cheated. In the power of the blessing Jacob receives at the end of his wrestling match, he goes out to meet his wronged brother. Esau runs to him, arms outstretched in forgiveness, and the two fall weeping on each other's necks. Jacob says, "I have seen your face as though it were the face of God, because you were pleased with me" (Gen. 33:10).

Suppose this were to be a paradigm of reconciliation for us Christians? Suppose we were to wrestle with God and our fears and our dark past as Jacob did, and go to meet each other with the assurance of God's blessing? Suppose we were to give the kind of open-hearted forgiveness to each other that Esau gave Jacob? Suppose we were to give one another generous gifts as those brothers did?

It would certainly be a fitting sort of way to celebrate the jubilee year of the World Council of Churches. And it would prepare the way for us as Christians the world over to call all people to a celebration of jubilee as a way of turning to God that would give

people everywhere a wonderful fresh start. Of course, we could do so with integrity only if we showed the meaning of jubilee in our own life together. One key provision of God's jubilee command was that all debts were to be forgiven. We all owe one another very large debts. We have not paid each other in the coin of love, respect and understanding on all too many occasions in the past. Will we release each other from our past debts? If so, there is some hope that in Ireland, in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe, in Africa and in many other places, people will see that the only way forward is to forgive and forget past debts.

Another key provision of God's jubilee was to free slaves and restore land to the original owners. Basically, this was a way of wiping out accumulated injustices against people, and giving them a fresh start. Are we willing to do that in our own communities? And for each other? This means we need to be willing to acknowledge ways in which we have been unjust. How else can we turn to a God who is just? The humility and sacrifice which this sort of jubilee demands is only possible when we are focused on God and God's grace for the future. If we insist on defending ourselves, insisting on the righteousness of our positions and our past, we clog up the channels of divine grace. To turn to God really does mean to turn to God's future for us – of which jubilee is only a faint and wonderful foreshadowing. The past is not the way home. It limits us and imprisons us in our failures and ignorance. God is always calling us forward, into a future filled with divine promise. To face God is to face forward into that unknown but grace-filled future, in which there will be no more hurting or destroying, and in which all people will be gathered together at God's great banqueting table, sharing fully in divine abundance.

Reasons to Rejoice

Christian Joy in a Secularized World

Arne Fritzson

Perhaps it would be too obvious to begin an article about the Christian perception of rejoicing by quoting Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice". Perhaps it would be better to start by quoting that old song by Duke Ellington, "It Don't Mean a Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing" and offering this as a metaphor for what joy means for Christian faith. It may appear to trivialize the meaning of Christian faith to say that it must be joyful to be meaningful – but that is exactly the idea I want to pursue in this article. Christian faith is not all about joy, by no means; but joy is a crucial aspect, one which cannot be excluded from the total picture of what faith is, and if it is excluded then the picture will deviate seriously from what the Bible tells us about that faith.

Christian faith has a fundamentally positive way of perceiving life in God's world. As Christians we are glad for the life God has given us and want to "sing aloud" of God's mercy every morning (Psalm 59:16). The encounter with the living and triune God gives joy because it comes from, is rooted in, love. This has its foundation in the creed, which speaks about God as the creator and giver of life. The Old Testament texts which describe how God creates the cosmos are songs of praise. Job 38 speaks of an act of creation in ecstatic joy. It is almost as if the world is a result of a volcanic outburst of joy from God. "When the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy!" (Job 38:7). We meet the same atmosphere in Psalm 104, where God's act of creation and the care that God gives the creation are pictured for us as harmonious, something that gives pleasure both to God and the creatures God has made.

God created humanity in God's image, male and female; that in itself says that humanity was created for relationship. It is "not good" that the man is alone, says God. As God is a communion of the three persons in the Godhead, so human beings must live in communion. We are social creatures, created to live in the joy that good relationships bring. Joy is something that we feel together with others. It has intrinsically something to do with relations, and we find it odd to see someone sitting alone and laughing.

God created human beings to live together, and indeed one can not become a human being alone. That means that to be human is not only to be in relationship with others, but to be fundamentally dependent on others. God created us to live in good

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relationships with God, with each other, with ourselves and with the rest of the creation. To live in those four good relationships is to live in peace, in God's *shalom*. Peace in its biblical meaning is something much more than simply the absence of war, as we see in the prophecy in Isaiah 65:25. The picture there seems romantic, unrealistic: do not wolves stop being wolves on the day they feed peacefully together with lambs? But this image shatters our expectations, telling us about a harmonious state that goes beyond perceptions of what is "normal".

Another biblical image of peace which must be understood in terms of relationship is the benediction in Numbers 6:24-25: "the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace". It is when we meet face to face with God that peace, God's *shalom*, is given to us. It is when we see a face turned to us, when we can meet someone in acceptance and appreciation, that we experience ourselves as whole human beings; and this experience speaks to us about God's intention in creating us.

This means that from the Christian perspective life is not something neutral, either good or bad depending on the content we give to it. No, as Christians we believe that life is in itself a gift from God, a blessing, an outflowing of God's love.

This does not mean Christian faith is unrealistic, unaware of the hardships and evils of life; but it sees these as something abnormal, something that has perverted God's creation. The "normal" status of the creation is reflected in Genesis 1:31, where it is said that God "saw everything that he had made and, indeed, it was very good". That is the basic rationale for Christian joy. It is something primal, as is the joy a child may experience when playing, a spontaneous expression of the joy inherent in the creation. Done without calculation, a child's play comes directly from the happiness of being alive. Here Christian faith can recognize creation as God intends, not perverted by evils present in this world.

But exactly that perversion by evil means that this happy picture does not encompass the full meaning of joy in the Christian faith. What sin means is that the good relationships are torn apart, and humankind no longer lives in God's *shalom*. Peace is taken away from us and the reasons and scope for joy are reduced. The ultimate sign of the evil in the world is death, which tears apart permanently the relation between human beings.

Because the evils of sin and death have invaded God's creation, the joy lying within the creation itself is restrained; and we experience the fact that we can not alter our situation by ourselves. In a world where there is death humanity finds that it cannot, by itself, escape consequences of evil in the world. We need someone from "outside" to save us; we experience our need for salvation, the second article of the Christian faith.

In my culture we have had for a long time a difficulty in speaking about evil. We have almost convinced ourselves that evil is a "pedagogical" problem, one we can avoid by having more knowledge and by everyone trying a little harder to "be good". This difficulty of perceiving evil as a real power outside of us has influenced theology and preaching in Western societies, leading to problems in explaining the second article of the creed and understanding what Christology are all about. After all, how can you explain the meaning of a saviour when you cannot talk about the evils from which we need to be saved?

But is it not too much to talk about evil in an article which is supposed to deal with the theme of rejoicing in the Christian faith? My answer is "No", because if we

claim to lay the foundation for this theme in the first article, in the creation – in what is common for all humanity regardless of their faith or lack of faith – then we must try to relate the fundamental goodness of creation to the fact that evil things happen in this world.

We must wrestle with the questions: how we can talk about joy having a foundation in creation itself, and being fundamental to human life, when there is so much evidence to the contrary, when there is so much suffering, pain and despair in our world? Why *should* we rejoice in this world? Why *should* we have a positive attitude to life? Why *should* we perceive life as a gift from a loving God? From the Christian perspective these questions point to a "gap" in the understanding of life, a gap which is filled by Christology, by the second article of the Christian faith. That is what the faith claims: when we are asked as Christians how we can talk of a loving God who gives us reason for rejoicing, we always turn to Jesus Christ. It is in our understanding of the second article of the creed that we find the ability to cope with the fact of evil in this world, and find the possibility of rejoicing as a fundamental part of Christians life.

In much of Western theology an outline of the second article of the creed begins with the incarnation, and then adds an explanation of the atonement and resurrection. But this way of talking about the second article places the emphasis differently from the New Testament and the early church. There it is the Easter faith, the belief in the resurrection, that is the centre of the Christian proclamation (Acts 2:32; 13:27-31; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:3-7; Rev. 5:9) It is the joyous shout of the Easter morning, "Christ is risen. Yes, truly risen", that is the foundational Christian confession: Jesus Christ is Lord!

The apostle Paul's conversion has to do with his relation to the crucifixion of Jesus. As a Pharisee, Paul had learned the word of the law: "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut. 21:23), which Paul also quoted in Galatians (3:13). After his conversion the cross has a totally different meaning for Paul; but he was well aware that "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18). In Christ every human value is turned upside down, because "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor. 1:25). The cross teaches us that, in God's presence, the notions of "strength" and "weakness" have new, radically different meanings. At the cross Jesus took all our weaknesses, everything that is broken in our lives, and carried them through death and darkness into the resurrection, to life and joy.

This gives our faith a very special kind of optimism, one that cannot be taken away from us as Christians: for after Easter every disappointment can be interpreted in light of the atonement, thus receiving a new meaning. Here is the point at which the joy which God has "laid down" in the creation finds its deeper meaning. In Christ we are "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) which means that the joy that God has given to us has reached its fulfilment. In Christ we "have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10), a life which is far more than mere existence. By the same token, eternal life is more than unmending existence; the Christian perception of eternal life is that one lives in the four "good relationships" which are God's *shalom* as mentioned above.

So Paul writes to the Thessalonians that they should "rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16). Rejoicing is the *normal* state of Christians, whose joy springs from a constant amazement at the gift of life and of the gospel, the good news of God's love for us in his Son and the salvation which God brings to us. Because it is easy, in face of many

situations in our world, to forget the reasons for joy, God has sent the "Counsellor", the Holy Spirit. Here we touch the third article of the creed, which speaks of the Spirit and its presence in the world. And for Christian faith, the Spirit is intimately related to the theme of joy. Joy is identified as a "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit fills us and help us confess our faith in Jesus; indeed, according to Paul, without the Spirit such a confession is not possible (1 Cor. 12:3).

The spirit of joy and peace equips the children of God to serve each other and the world into which Jesus has sent them (John 20:21-22). The gifts of the Spirit are given to each for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). No one in the church is without gifts from the Spirit; on the contrary, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, the "parts of the body" which seem "weaker" are indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22). As Christians – and churches – we are challenged by the gospel to acknowledge the gifts each member has been given by the Spirit. When we neglect any member of the body of Christ we are wasting precious resources that God has bestowed on the church through the Spirit.

We need to consider carefully the "special role" of the parts of the body which seem weaker. These have been given "greater honour", says Paul, in order that there may be no discord in the body (1 Cor. 12:24-25). The parts of the body that seem weaker are *needed* to remind the church that, in Christ, the human perceptions of strength and weakness are turned upside down. Paul writes that Jesus "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4) In relation to the apparently "weaker members" of the body, the church, this means that it is not a matter of a weak group which needs "taking care of", but something that *is needed* for the common good of the church as a whole. A church which does not have room for these members denies itself part of the joy that God wants to give to it.

The Christian understanding of rejoicing is closely linked to that special encounter between God and humanity which we call worship. Thus Psalm 122 exclaims: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'", and Psalm 100 tells us to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" and to "come into his presence with singing".

In coming together in worship the people of God rejoice for God's act of creation, for salvation in Christ and for the gifts given to us by the Spirit. The joy we find in coming together for worship in God's presence empowers us to go into the world as missionaries of God's love: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace" (Isa. 55:12).

Another important dimension of the Christian understanding of joy and rejoicing is that of our eschatological hope. We can relate this hope to what we said earlier about the joy and peace we receive when we experience God's face "turned towards us". This thought is expressed in eschatological terms in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where Paul speaks strikingly about our hope for the future as meeting God not in a revelation, and not through God's word, but "face to face".

In my own country, Sweden, many Christians and churches are tired. Many people feel that they do not have time to "catch up" with life, with what is really important. Unemployment has risen in Sweden during this decade, which means that those who do have work have even more to do. We live in a high speed culture, with many expectations put upon us and with enormous time pressures. In our culture a great deal is controlled by the media, and we constantly receive messages from all sources and

directions demanding our attention. It is easy in such a context for the church and the Christian faith to become just one more thing vying for my attention, one more thing I simply do not have time for. Through this dynamic – caused not by the church but by the pressures of modern life and by the media – the church gives many people a "bad conscience". And ironically it is not those who are hostile or indifferent to the church, but exactly those who have some feeling for it, who are interested in it or remember that it was important to their parents, who feel the most guilty.

As a pastor in such a culture I feel it is important to remind people what the Bible teaches us about joy and its vital role in the Christian faith. The church must not be another "thing" that demands my time, that reminds me that I do not have the time for everything that I am "supposed" to do. As Christians we must resist having a bad conscience *imposed* on us by the pressures of secular culture and by the media.

It is vitally important that we define what is essential in the Christian faith. We need to find space in our lives and in our calendars to reflect on what Christian faith means for us, and on the gifts which God gives us through our faith. Christian faith should be something that carries *us*, not something that we have to carry.

"Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", the theme of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches, has a very important message to Christians in my increasingly secularized part of the world. In our churches, we need to find reasons to rejoice. As the Duke Ellington song says, "It Don't Mean a Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing". Thus it is with joy for the Christian faith: we cannot grow as Christians, and see the power in our faith, without joy. So I will end this article, even if it might seem obvious, by quoting Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

Hope

A Caribbean Perspective

Neville Callam

> The Western Liberation Uprising of 1832, which marks the climax of the African-Jamaicans' struggle against slavery, and the British parliament's Act of Emancipation in 1833, belong together.[1]
>
> [Sam Sharpe] struck the hammer-blow against an economic and social system which was entrenched in the Americas, and which many considered essential to the continued prosperity of Europe.[2]

They dared to hope – who once were shackled in the bondage of slavery. Cruelly sold into slavery and forcibly transported from their African home, they came half-clad to the Caribbean in ships packed to capacity, in circumstances which mocked their dignity, if not denying its very existence.

Disembarking from the ships – or more accurately, being off-loaded from them – in Carib islands, they were often separated from others of their own clan. All were required to work in circumstances which were calculated to undo any consciousness of solidarity in the group called *homo sapiens*. Many endured the cane fields, with their overseers and "drivers", the heat and the whips. Yet they sought a way to establish a new identity which eschewed the newly-found isolation of individualism and instilled a purpose which was generated not by mere human ingenuity, but by a faith which gave them *hope*.

Samuel Sharpe was not one of them, but he knew their story. Although he died with a parliament of dreams in his head – dreams largely unrealized in his own lifetime – Sharpe has not been relegated to the rubbish heap of vain dreamers in Caribbean history. Instead this man, affectionately called "Daddy Sharpe" or "Sam Sharpe", now memorialized in Sam Sharpe Square – formerly Market Square – in Montego Bay, Jamaica, stands as a paradigm for all who live on the underside of history but desire to know how truly to live with Christian hope. Sharpe experienced the resolve to grasp the cup of hope even while wearing the handcuffs of slavery.

Sharpe was not one of the hundreds of thousands who were sold into slavery by his misguided African brothers, purchased like common chattel by Europeans who worshipped at the altar of mammon, and transported to the Caribbean where they were made to endure the inhumanity of slavery.

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Sharpe was born in 1801 in Montego Bay of African parentage, and was named after his slave-master, Samuel Sharpe, a lawyer who owned an estate in Coopers Hill, Montego Bay. Sharpe grew up with the stories he heard about Africa. Put to work as a domestic slave, he knew the indignity of ending the work week without receiving pay, due to his status as chattel on his master's plantation.

In the face of the inhumanity of slavery, some wilt and become willing participants in their own dehumanization. Not so Sam Sharpe; he dared to hope that God would one day free him and his African-Jamaican brothers and sisters from the shackles of slavery.

Sharpe, who was made a national hero of Jamaica in 1975, had been a deacon in the Montego Bay Baptist Church, then pastored by the Rev. Thomas Burchell, a missionary from the Baptist Missionary Society of London, for whom the church was later named. A literate and articulate young man, Sharpe learned and taught the principles of the Christian faith and came to develop the unshakeable conviction of the "natural equality of man with regard to freedom; and referring to the Holy Scripture as his authority, denying that the white man had any more right to hold the Blacks in bondage, than the Blacks had to enslave the Whites."[3] This Baptist deacon was "Daddy", or "Ruler", in the Native Baptist movement. The course of the rebellion he led in Western Jamaica bears a stark resemblance to that of the later Morant Bay rebellion in the east. In both, the Native Baptists played a significant role.[4]

In face of the oppression meted out to the people, Sharpe mobilized a group of leading men on the sugar estates in Western Jamaica to take action showing the strength of their hope for freedom – a hope which was not content simply to bear with the atrocities of the present while cherishing the longing for a better day in another land. Sharpe and his men developed a plan to secure economic rights for all the enslaved African-Jamaicans.

Slave masters were required to allow the slaves a three-day holiday at Christmas time. Sharpe's plan was to engage the full force of those enslaved in non-violent protest, a solemn work stoppage, a stubborn refusal to work on December 28 – the day when the Christmas holidays would come to an end. Sharpe could understand the possibility of a general strike as a medium through which the oppressed could express the value of the very resource which their oppressors had alienated from them – their own labour. He was a trade unionist before the era of trade unionism in Jamaica.

Needless to say, keen planners would have considered the likelihood of their erstwhile oppressors using force of arms against them, and for this reason, Sharpe doubtless had an alternative plan which involved the people acting in self-defence should this be necessary. However what Sharpe really desired was the purchase of freedom through using the tactic of a massive work stoppage. The enslaved people were to return to work once they, and those in whose business they would then serve, were able to negotiate acceptable terms of employment.

As it turned out, in place of the hush of a work stoppage at the time when the reaping of the sugar crop should have begun, an event that should have rocked the captains of industry and spurred them to negotiate terms with their former slaves, what eventuated was the dusty brilliance of the night time skies, as slaves put sugar cane plantations to the torch on the evening of December 27.

Sharpe's plan did not have a chance to be fully executed. Instead the passion of the enslaved and the fury of those who were in power combined to produce a blood-

bath. In the wake of what the enslaved called the "Baptist War", and the trials which followed, the death toll stood at 597, with Blacks accounting for 580 and whites and their brown allies seventeen. In addition, twelve whites and three browns were wounded.

On 23 May 1832, Sharpe strolled to the gallows in what is now named Sam Sharpe Square and surrendered his life at the executioner's hand. This was after a brief period of imprisonment following his trial and condemnation in Her Majesty's Court on 19 April 1832. "At no time did his courage, his nobility of spirit shine more brightly than on the day of his execution."[5]

Each year, Sharpe is remembered as one of the heroes who served the cause of emancipation of African-Jamaicans, and paved the way for all people to understand the painful joy of entertaining real hope in the midst of life today.

The captivity of hope

> ... in spite of the prevailing conditions, many features of Caribbean existence already spell freedom and hope... Wherever they have been able to recognize the possibilities for solidarity with other oppressed peoples, and have attempted to link their struggle for full humanity with the struggles of similar contexts elsewhere, the sounds of genuine hope have filled the air.[6]

> [Christianity, argued Dr. Thomas Coke, the Methodist preacher, would make the slaves] more contented with their humble situation, than those who still adhere to the barbarous superstitions of pagan idolatry.[7]

To hope is confidently to affirm, in the conviction that ultimately good will triumph over evil, that the sphere of hope which will be realized extends beyond the present age. Hope is stronger than death.

Sam Sharpe knew this dimension of hope. It was a regular diet of the sermons the missionaries preached during the period of slavery in the Caribbean. It was believed that the enslaved needed to be assured that, ultimately, their rights would be restored. Often this was offered as a reason why the cruelty of slavery could be endured. A brighter day was promised when God would vindicate the oppressed and suitably reward them.

People have certainly exploited the hope that Jesus *will come again to judge the living and the dead* to lull others into contentment with their unjust plight; but in spite of this, contemporary Christians dare not abandon the eschatological vision which comprehends the fullness of *shalom* in the heavenly kingdom. To abandon this vision is to lose the joy of the final victory won by Christ in the resurrection, and tasted in its fullness by those whom God preserves "unto the day". To lose this vision is to grasp only partially the splendour of truth which shines forth from the pages of holy scripture.

It is indeed true that ultimately the slave master will not triumph over the enslaved. Even when the enslaved dies before gaining freedom, physical death is not the limit to life. We affirm by faith *the life of the world to come*, believing that, in our resurrected Lord, we see the *first fruits of those who have fallen asleep* (cf. 1 Cor.15:20).

But an obsession with the expectation that hope will be fully realized in a future realm has frightening implications. It produces an other-worldliness which narrows the sweep of the hope we enjoy in Christ, and robs us of the challenge of participating

in the *partial* realization of hope now, in the world in which we fashion our stewardship. It constricts our involvement in the process whereby God responds to the faith of those who confidently dare to hope, even though they dwell in the misery of life's grievous injustices. Whatever assaults human dignity today must be addressed *today*, in the firm hope that evil can be overcome. To ignore this perspective is to imprison hope, to make its realization captive to a future age. It is to ignore the relevance, for liberation today, of the fact that Jesus Christ has dethroned the forces of evil, forces which his followers are empowered to resist *now*, in the strength which the Holy Spirit supplies. The millions of involuntary exiles who were savagely torn from the ancestral civilizations of West Africa and enslaved in the Caribbean should not merely have dreamed of a distant future in which the hope of a life in freedom would find fulfilment. If their hope was not going to hold them captive but rather set them *free*, it needed to nourish their resolve to struggle for a just society, one in which they would be treated as human beings made in the image of God.

The promise of hope

> The revolt failed to accomplish the immediate purpose of its authors; yet by it, a further wound was dealt to slavery which accelerated its destruction, for it demonstrated to the imperial legislature that among the Negroes themselves, the spirit of freedom had been so widely diffused as to render it most perilous to postpone the settlement of the most important question of emancipation to a later period.[8]
>
> [The freedom fighters] succeeded in making slavery an unsupportably expensive system to maintain.[9]

To accept Christian hope is courageously to affirm *here and now* the lived experience of divine sovereignty over history. It is stubbornly to refuse to bow at the altar of oppression, by taking seriously the fact that the reign of God has already begun. It is to understand that the church becomes truly the communion of the people of hope only when it manifests, here and now, the love of Christ for all creation. The community of those who are reconciled to God, "who live with the memory of the cross and the empty tomb and [who] look forward to the final takeover by Christ, cannot be passive about the political and economic issues of the world."[10]

It may amaze some that the enslaved who dared to hope even while living in the grip of the terror that was slavery led a life that was not bereft of joy. In the midst of their suffering their spirit was not broken, because they lived with hope. Those who could not understand their joy might have attributed it to the pervasive presence of vain imaginings or false ideas. However, the slaves themselves knew that their joy was at once the consequence and the source of the hope which their faith nourished.

Truly to hope is to make oneself vulnerable. Those who cherish real Christian hope refuse to allow negative experiences to destroy their hope, for it is stronger than fear, pain and despair. They understand that certain forms of Christian activism are the mode by which authentic, lived hope is incarnated. Because hope is alive in them, they can dare to take risky actions which seek the radical transformation of their unjust situation. In this process, they may lose their lives; but they are pursuing the commitment to a Lord whose justice guarantees the betterment of the oppressed, and not the mere preservation of their own physical existence. Because of their unshakeable confidence in the goodness and the justice of God, they show forth a fortitude which

reflects a clear understanding of the relation between crucifixion and resurrection in human history.

This has something to say, significantly, about the nature and use of power. It was the awareness of the relationship between vulnerability and hope that led Sam Sharpe and his followers to an acceptable understanding of power. Theirs was not a desire to destroy their oppressors, but instead to humanize them. They sought to liberate them from living off the exploitation of those who were the victims of their base desire to maximize wealth. The understanding of power held by Sharpe and his followers was subversive, owing to their own distinctive reading both of the reality they faced and of the options that confronted them.[11] True Christian hope rejects the ideology of power as either mere domination by, or meek submission to, the might of the oppressor.

Those who regard human engagement to realize hope as being intrinsic to hope itself may properly regard themselves as co-workers with the God who defends rightness and goodness, and who empowers the weak to engage in action to overcome evil. Such persons know the ambiguity of some human actions grounded in the faith on which hope securely rests. As human beings act in hope, they may well be caught up in a painful web of compromise. They know that, where a situation of grave injustice exists, truly to act in hope should inspire the repentance of the oppressor as well as the emancipation of both the oppressed and the oppressor – so that in the end everyone may rejoice. This is so because hope is love's constant bedfellow, and the prayer which is the groundwork of hope constantly remembers the imperatives of human solidarity.

Those who act in hope know that the ultimacy of God's action is distinct from the provisionality of our own efforts. Not surprisingly, Sam Sharpe was saddened by the wanton destruction that the Baptist war involved. It was the intention of his team to secure the right of the enslaved to just returns for their labour. It was not their intention to destroy life and property. Yet, as it actually turned out, the incendiary zeal of the oppressed lit up the evening skies with a signal to the authorities suggesting that Sharpe and his fellow protesters were not the oppressed seeking justice, but rather a violent group threatening both their safety and their livelihood. For this reason, hopeful Christians who elect to give decisive expression to their hope must not be arrogant, triumphalistic activists who celebrate the downfall of their former oppressors, but humble and visionary servants who regularly scour their own minds to detect the need for repentance, and to seek the goal of reconciliation. The consequences of our striving to express hope are sometimes quite tragic. Even so, in our action to express hope it is not that we misrepresent the hope itself, but that sometimes our practice of faithfulness to this hope is deficient.

It is in the light of the ultimate hope that the reign of God has in fact been inaugurated, and the conviction that God's reign undergirds the church's present proclamation of Christian hope, that believers in Christ turn in love towards the neighbour. They engage tirelessly in efforts to overcome the conditions which mock the dignity of their sisters and brothers. They do this because of their conviction that the healing presence of the living Christ, on whom our hope rests, is powerful to transform desperate human situations. They do this because they desire that everyone should turn to God – and rejoice in hope!

NOTES

[1] Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People*, Kingston, Jamaica, Ian Randle, 1998, p.21.
[2] C. S. Reid, *Samuel Sharpe: From Slave to National Hero,* Kingston, Jamaica, Bustamante Institute for Public and International Affairs, 1988, p.4.
[3] Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 2nd ed., London, 1868, p. 111.
[4] Gad Heuman, *"The Killing Time": The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica*, London, Macmillan, 1994, pp.33-43.
[5] Sherlock and Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People*, p.227.
[6] Kortright Davis, *Emancipation Still Coming: Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1990, p.10.
[7] Edward Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1971, p. 263.
[8] Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, p. 118.
[9] Richart Hart, *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery, vol. 2: Blacks in Rebellion*, Kingston, Jamaica, Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1985, p. 336.
[10] Ashley Smith, *Emerging from Innocence: Religion, Theology and Development*, Mandeville, Jamaica, Eureka, 1991, p.90.
[11] Burchel Taylor, *The Church Taking Sides*, Kingston, Jamaica, Bethel Baptist Church, 1995, p. 58.

Turn to the Holistic God

Do Not Rejoice in Hope While Others Are in Despair

Geevarghese Mar Osthathios

The theme of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", raises one of the most important questions of our time: Who is God? This question is posed in a world in which even people within the church are turning away from God in droves and turning to consumerism and human-centred ethics and science. The religious alternatives seem only to be liberalism (with generous tolerance and no convictions about God) or fundamentalism (with only convictions and no tolerance).

The late Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, a president of the WCC from 1983-1991, coined an apt phrase to describe the contemporary preference for immanence without transcendence and the substitution of "humanization" for the patristic idea of *theosis* or divinization: "the Great Secular Heresy". Reason and the human person are exalted; God, faith and ethics are relativized and diluted.

The popular idea that Yahweh is a Jewish God and not the God of the Gentiles, or that Allah is God of the Muslims alone and not Allah the compassionate, the socially compassionate one loving all, must be challenged. Similarly, though the Vedas and the Upanishads interpret advaitic, absolute Brahman as *nirguna*, or "beyond attributes", Sankara bases his *saguna* or "attribute-full" Brahman on the Vedas. While the Keval-advaita school distinguishes between the ontological eternal Brahman and the existential Iswara, Hinduism has many Bhakti schools, and love is central in all of them.

Like Sankara, the philosophically inclined church fathers distinguished between the *ousia* or essence of the unknowable God and the *energeia* of God revealed in the nature of Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed, which is more theological than philosophical, established the dogma that Jesus Christ is "very God of very God", of the same essence as the Father (*homoousion to patri*). What is this essence? It is eternal, all-inclusive, infinite divine love (*agape*). God is love (1 John 4:8,16). The holistic God is this eternal God of love.

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God revealed in Christ as agapic love

Reinhold Niebuhr concludes an appreciation of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the patriarch of liberal Protestantism and the godfather of "Christology from below", as follows:

> Finally, we have to thank Schleiermacher for establishing high on the list of virtues indispensable to honest theology the resolution to maintain Christian thought in the painful but necessary dialogue with the faculties of the university and the *secular sciences – the most valuable trait of Protestant liberalism in the last century and this.*[1]

Schleiermacher, with an emphasis on feeling coming from his Moravian background, could reject the dogmas of incarnation and Trinity while holding on to the sinlessness and uniqueness of Christ the Redeemer. But no Indian philosopher can see the logic of this, and all intellectuals ask, directly or indirectly, for some absolute revelation of God in history.

Who can defend a monad God, a God self-contained and alone, as love in eternal action? The holistic God, who comprehends singularity and plurality, has to be a social God of the unity of love – in the plurality or *thrimurthy* of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*satchidananda*) and Allah the compassionate one. The Trinity is not a mathematical formula that says 1x1x1=1 (as St Basil said, "What is number in the Godhead?"), but a qualitative definition of God as Love.

To the eyes of faith, God was in Christ. To the one who has that deep faith, the mystery of incarnation is the key that unlocks the "tremendous and fascinating mystery" of God. The love Christ revealed in his person and work, in his teaching and death, in his resurrection and ascension was not exclusive but all-inclusive, infinite and not finite, heavenly but including the earthly. Though the incarnate God hid the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of Godhead in himself like the latent heat of energy, he revealed the *ousia* of God, which is fully and unquestionably love.

The Orthodox church, like other historical churches which have not discarded continuity in favour of discontinuity as liberalism has done, takes seriously those New Testament passages which elucidate the divinity of Christ: "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9); "our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13); "he is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20); "he was in the form of God" (Phil. 2:5); "he is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb. 1:3); "the Logos was God... and the Logos became flesh" (John 1:1,14). The inclusiveness Peter expressed in Acts 10:35 ("in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him") must be understood as God's revelation that Cornelius can receive the Holy Spirit before baptism, though baptism is not withheld at the final stage. The Holy Spirit is not limited to the baptized alone, and the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22).

Metanoia from what to whom?

It is not fashionable today to speak about sin, because our inner eye has been blinded by slogans like "scientific worldview", "secularism", "humanization", "contextual ethics", "rationalism" – all of which represent horizontalism without verticality or transcendence. Once God disappears, Satan also disappears; and the boundary between the two becomes thin or ambiguous. Tillich uses three words to describe the marks of

modern men and women alienated from God: concupiscence (lust), *hubris* (pride) and unfaith. Metanoia is a 180-degree turn from these to *agape*, humility and faith.

Hosea 14:1 is a key passage for the theme of the eighth assembly: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity." The turning for which the prophet calls in this chapter is from trust in Assyria (military force) and in idols (consumerism, the globalized market) to trust in the God from whom "the orphan finds mercy" (vs.3), the God who is "like an evergreen cypress", from whom your faithfulness, or your fruit, comes (vs.8).

For whom does God give evergreens and fruit-bearing trees, grains for food, raw materials for industry, fresh air, sun, moon – in short all created things? Surely it is for all God's children, created in his own image. Would any human father divide his children into categories of master and slave? If we turn to the heavenly Father, he will command all his children to work together in solidarity for the good of all the members of his family. Modernism and post-modernism are trying to make the human being the measure of all things without the decisive centrality of the God to whom all must turn in justice, truth, freedom and peace, motivated by love.

What is happening today is neither divinization nor humanization but animalization, a turning towards the three beastly instincts of self, sex and herd. The egoism of the profit motive for selfish enjoyment is the hallmark of global capitalism – and its consequences are only too apparent. The dangers of the permissiveness of sexual life endorsed by certain forms of "contextual ethics" are also evident. The herd instinct lies behind casteism, apartheid, ethnocentrism and unwavering loyalty to one's political party whether its policies are good or bad.

According to Scripture, metanoia is a radical change – from Satan and the passions of the flesh to God (cf. Eph. 2:1-10), from Adam's transgression and death to the life of the last Adam, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:15-20), from selfishness and exploitation to sharing in basic needs (cf. Luke 3:10-14), from life in the flesh to life in the Spirit (Rom. 8), from hope in this world alone to hope in the resurrected life (1 Cor. 15). To sum up this transformation, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The one triune God of all

The Lord's prayer is a prayer for the coming of the kingdom of God. Its petitions for the hallowing of God's name, for the coming of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, through the doing of God's will are the supreme prayer anyone on earth can pray.

Turning to God is inseparable from turning to the kingdom of God. The double commandment from the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) which Jesus brought together into the single commandment to love God above all and your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:28ff. and pars) is the greatest ethical height to which anyone could aspire, though the incarnate Logos Christ alone could fully practise it. In this connection it is noteworthy that the Lord's prayer does not use the first person singular in praying for provisions (daily bread), pardon, protection and preservation – as all these are the needs of all of humanity and should not be enjoyed selfishly while others are in want. It is for this reason also that the Lord did not turn stones into bread when he was tempted: he would not do any miracle for himself. Hence Dietrich Bonhoeffer called him "the Man for others". If we turn to God, we will also live for others.

Neither selfishness nor communalism is seen in Christ. Witnessing greater faith in a Gentile centurion in Capernaum than among his own people (Matt. 8:10), he discloses a shocking truth: "Many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom [the visible church] will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv.11f.). I hope Christian fundamentalists will study this passage and many others like it (cf. Matt. 7:22f.; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:25-29). The distinction between the visible church of the baptized and the kingdom of God, the invisible church of those who do the will of God, is known only to God. Many misread the so-called Great Commission on the basis of incorrect translations as a commission to baptize all nations. Jesus' charge to his followers was rather "to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..., teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19f.). What is commanded is not to "baptize all nations" but to bring them under the discipline of God as manifested in Christ. As Sardar K.M. Panikkar has rightly observed:

> The attack on religion has definitely failed now. Even the most ardent workers in the mission field do not have any longer the hope of converting India to Christianity... Hindu religion has emerged triumphant from the struggle and today does not feel her supremacy challenged from any side... It is the Hindu society that has to be basically reorganized and not the Hindu religion.[2]

We must appreciate the conviction of Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, K.M. Panikkar and others that Hinduism is *Sanathana* and stands for the good of all creation. Our duty is mission not under the motto of church growth but for the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God, as disciples of Jesus Christ who is "very God of very God". The answer to communalism and the so-called Hindu fundamentalism is not our own fundamentalism but practising the life-style of Jesus Christ. Who could deny that Gandhi did a better job of taking Jesus Christ as a role model than we nominally baptized Christians are doing?

Conversion is an integral human right, ensured to all citizens of India by the constitution. According to Sankaracharya, the *tat vam asi* principle of the Vedas and Upanishads gives the right to all human beings to say, "I am Brahman" (*Aham Brahmasmi*) whether one is Hindu or Christian or Muslim or Parsi. Brahman is one without a second (*ekam eva advitiyam*) and all *jivatmas* are not separate but one Brahman. Salvation is realization that one is identical with Brahman. As long as Sanathana Hinduism teaches that all ways lead to the same goal, there is no justification for saying that the Hindu way alone will lead to Brahman. Thus philosophical Hinduism has been the most tolerant of all religions, never attacking the Semitic religions which stress surrender to the will of Allah (Islam) and salvation as Christification or divinization (Christianity).

Liberation theologians describe salvation as the liberation of the poor and the oppressed from the modern capitalist Pharaohs, who exploit them through transnational corporations and free trade and the market economy and globalization – all of which fortify the power in the hands of the rich and keep the poor and marginalized powerless. The Orthodox churches would say that liberation from the bondage of Egypt is only the first step of salvation. The next step is to enter Canaan, the kingdom of God, through the word and sacraments, available in the church. This is called divin-

ization. The call to baptism is not forced on anyone, but if anyone desires membership of the church through baptism, he or she must have the freedom to receive it and may not be forbidden.

This applies both ways. If a non-Hindu wishes to join Hinduism through *sudhi karma*, he or she must have the freedom to do so. A change of religion in India must be taken as lightly as a change of political party affiliation.

Political power and religion cannot be united or confused, as religion stands for service to all, not power to rule others. The ultimate trait of religion is selfless love or *nishkarma karma* or surrender to the will of God, not power-mongering for one's own religion. In the words of the apostle Paul, "the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). What the kingdom of God demands from its members is ultimate loyalty, not to one's church or religion but to the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is love and selfless sharing. Though all religions are ways to the kingdom of God, some are shorter and some are longer ways; and the devotee is free to choose the path that is most satisfying to his or her *atman* or soul or inner person.

God shared freedom with human beings by limiting his own freedom; thus God cannot crash the gate, but one must open the door. Love knows no bounds but loves all without distinction of caste or creed or colour, as God gives rain to the just and the unjust. Freedom to say No, even to God, constitutes the image of God given to the human species alone.

Freedom can act only If evil and good are there to choose from. Hence, in the creation story in Genesis 1, darkness was on the face of the earth before light was created, to show that evil is uncreated and yet existed without ontic being, so that freedom might be fully used by Adam and Eve. To prevent a person from choosing baptism or *sudhi* or circumcision is to act against that God-given freedom which the *atman* or human being alone has.

The failure of communism was due to the curtailment of the human right of choice – in this case the choice of a party, since there was only the communist party. Even though capitalism allows personal freedom, its fall is equally certain if its aim is not justice for all – remember that the fall of Adam was because of the misuse of freedom. Freedom is divine, licence is demonic.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice..."

According to St John Chrysostom, it is more difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice than it is to weep with those are weeping. Yet St Paul has commanded us to do both in order to show our solidarity with the human race. The command is to the citizens of the kingdom of God, which is the house of God, doing the will of God, as well as the whole of humanity created in the image of God.

The sequence of the WCC's eighth assembly theme, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", reminds us that we can rejoice only if we turn to God. My question is whether we can rejoice if it is only we who turn to God while other members of our human family are turning not to God but to the devil.

In Christian theology there is a distinction and equality between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet unity is in the unifying divine love eternally active in God himself. In the created order also, all are created in the same image of God, yet even identical twins have differences. The mystery of creation is that even two leaves of the

same tree are not identical in all respects. The answer is in mutuality, reciprocity and mutual dependence. Even in the original creation, heaven and earth are created together in mutual dependence. Similarly the sun and moon: "God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night" (Gen. 1:16). We know that the moon cannot give light at night without reflecting the light of the sun. In the same way, "male and female he created them", and the *imago Dei* was not only in each of them but also in the love between them, which made them one body.

Poverty is everywhere because we do not obey God. Hardly anyone reads Deuteronomy 15:4-5: "There will... be no one in need among you... if only you will obey the Lord your God." More familiar is the verse later in that chapter which is quoted in the New Testament: "There will never cease to be some in need on the earth" (v.11). The rich console themselves with that verse, not remembering that Jesus quoted it to Judas Iscariot, the thief and betrayer.

If we have the mind of Jesus, we will rejoice in every chance we have to empty ourselves, suffer with the pain of the suffering and give them hope in the place of their despair. If we have tasted heaven, our joy will be in converting those in the hellish slums of this world, not in rejoicing in hope as if Christ has given it to us alone. Even Confucius saw this truth: "If a man embraces the law of heaven in the morning, then he may die the same evening without regret."[3] We must not only weep with the weeping but wipe their tears in solidarity with them and give them hope.

The churches must imitate their Lord, take up their own cross in order to rejoice in giving hope to the hopeless, and not in their own salvation. In this respect, the doctrine of justification by faith alone seems to me to have done more harm than good, and it needs to be corrected by the epistle of James and by the paradigm of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

My title which speaks of turning to the "holistic God" is meant to convey the idea that a monad God cannot be love, and to beckon all to the triune God of creation and nature. And the second phrase – "do not rejoice while others are in despair" – is a suggestion that the theme be studied in the kenotic missionary hope whose joy is only in giving hope to the hopeless.

NOTES

[1] In Dean G. Peerman and Martin E. Marty, eds, *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, London, Collins, 1965, p.34; italics added.
[2] K.M. Pannikkar, *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 4th ed., 1967, pp.24f.
[3] Quoted by C.S. Song in Gerald Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1976, p.149.

Unity in Fullness

A Reflection on the Theme for the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches

S. Mark Heim

> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-19).

The World Council of Churches began at Amsterdam in 1948, rising from three strong waves moving through the founding churches. One movement (Faith and Order) struggled to overcome inherited confessional divisions and realize the visible unity of the church. Another (Life and Work) sought to respond to crises of war and injustice in the broader human community. A third (the international missionary movement) aimed to evangelize the world. For the ecumenical pioneers, these three lines converged. The horizon point that drew them together was the visible unity of the church, a *koinonia* in faith, life and witness. The church should be united in order to render its praise and confession to God with one heart, in order to serve the world which God loves, and in order that the world might believe. So seamless was this vision (in theory) that it appeared a natural analogy of God's triune economy. On the 50th anniversary of the World Council of Churches, this convergence is less clear.

There is division of opinion about the future shape of each one of these movements. Tension often marks their relations to each other within the World Council. And a crucial fourth movement has been added to the picture, a process of dialogue with the world's religious traditions. The relation of this effort to the other three movements, and the extent to which it is or should be truly distinct from them, are topics which have exercised the WCC much in recent years. The time is right indeed to consider a common understanding and vision for the World Council of Churches.

The eighth assembly will be a crucial turning point in this respect. It will face questions raised by the particular world situation at the time it meets, by needs and upheavals in the global human family. Unavoidable decisions are at hand about the

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institutional life and vision of the WCC itself, and these take place in the midst of accelerating changes in the global face of Christianity. Meeting in Africa, nearly twenty-five years after the Nairobi assembly, the WCC will return to a continent that embodies many of these changes: Christianity's demographic tilt towards the South and away from the West, the growth of indigenous and Pentecostal churches, the growing prominence of the relation between Islam and Christianity, struggles towards democracy and free markets – struggles crosscut with inequality and unrelieved poverty, important issues relating to cultural contextualization of the gospel.

The assembly will gather under the theme "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope". The theme highlights three classic dimensions of Christian life, each dramatically appropriate at the edge of the third millennium: repentance, thanksgiving, expectation. The challenge for the assembly will be to discern how these three aspects of the theme should shape the WCC's participation in the four movements mentioned above, movements which intertwine as the future of the ecumenical movement itself.

The assembly theme: three interlocking dimensions

The theme points to three "acts" in the Christian life of individuals and communities. These are bound together in one movement. Repentance is animated by hope and joy, and no living hope or thanksgiving lacks its renewed repentance. In fact, when we look closely at our lives or our churches, we often find it almost impossible to assign a sequence to these elements in any powerful movement of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is thanksgiving that swells into repentance, or unexpected hope that spills over into thanksgiving, or repentance that uncovers the first glimmers of hope. The sign of the Spirit is that no one of the three remains alone.

Turning to God is a turning away from what estranges us from God and each other, turning towards fullness of life with all creation in communion with God. Repentance is no isolated moment of sorrow or even of amendment of our lives, because it is above all an act of participation in a relationship, shaped by the specific character of the God towards whom we turn. We can turn away from our failures, our tattered absolutes, innumerable times, only to seek newer versions of the same things. Repentance is a turning that carries us towards the one living God, linking us to the source by whom we may rightly measure our errors but from whom unfailing energy for transformed life radiates. It is not an act that deserves God's reward, but one in which, through grace, our stubborn barriers fall, barriers which have deflected the divine love that is ever flowing to every creature.

Thanksgiving, too, is a cardinal Christian act. It arises in the liberation from our captivities, but it is always primarily rooted in the one *to whom* we turn. This is why thanksgiving can flourish in every condition, even in those where, *in all outward ways*, we remain bound. We need not wait for every tear to be dried before rejoicing that God is a God who saves, who establishes justice, who does not leave us in our sins. Even when as yet we see only the dimmest signs that we – individually or collectively – might share in the divine life, we can give thanks for the source of that life.

Nor is this thanksgiving only an episode – so that we may say "there are times to give thanks and times to despair". Clearly at certain moments there seems little reason to rejoice. We may feel this because of our own sorrow or pain or outrage. Or it may seem true in an even darker and more encompassing way, because God's purposes for justice and redemption in the world appear to be thwarted. This is why scripture so

often links thanksgiving and expectation: "rejoice in hope" (Rom. 12:12). Thanksgiving is part of the Christian life, even when we have no emotions of joy, no immediate good news in history, because we have an eschatological assurance that God is able finally to do "far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20).

Therefore thanksgiving is rooted in hope. This hope is sealed for us in Christ, for in Christ we see the first fruit of the extraordinary transformation God intends. "Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God" (1 Pet. 1:21). The scattered achievements of righteousness and holiness in history are drawn together by this hope as the true story of our future. Such hope is not passive. It provides a perspective from which our world as it is, however realistic its inequities and cruelties may seem, can never be accepted as inevitable. Hope sharpens our sense of human failings, but at the same time it preserves us from despair and empty rage, because it is a hope rooted in the love and communion which have already become real in history. This is why the New Testament writers so often distinguish this hope from mere wishing: it is a belief in things as yet unseen, but founded on what *is* already seen in Jesus.

Repentance: for the WCC as well

This call – to "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" – is one the eighth assembly is to share with the world. "Turn to God" is a critical word that must be addressed by the churches to the world and to individuals, for it invites change and transformation. It signals the turn *from* infidelity and abuse in personal relations, from economic exploitation, political oppression and cultural amorality in common life. The WCC can and must name these captivities, wherever they are deepest and most destructive, without partiality towards nation or culture. Churches can offer this call only in sorrow and in love, pointing away from themselves. Turn to God: not to our political prescriptions, our cultural and ecclesial traditions. The only thing of which the churches cannot empty themselves when they speak this word is what does not belong to them to begin with – Jesus Christ as the Word of God, the light that guides our fallible judgments about the direction we must go in order to turn to God.

The call for repentance must come to us also, as churches in the WCC. From what must we turn away if we are to turn towards God? If a prophetic vision of the world sometimes requires the council to challenge the behaviour of "others" – Christians who belong to communions other than those in the WCC, national governments, people of other religious traditions – then surely this same measure must be applied even more severely to "us", with special attention to our most characteristic temptations.

For example: the WCC can turn away from a sense of ownership of the ecumenical movement. In this year of jubilee, we can render back to God what has only been leased to us. A working draft for the Common Understanding and Vision document offered some helpful steps in this direction which, unhappily, do not appear in the latest version of that policy statement.[1] It suggested that the WCC and its member churches take part in the formation of a new, and much wider, global forum of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations. It further suggested or hoped that this eighth assembly of the WCC might be the last such assembly.[2] The assembly, that is, could give way to a more truly ecumenical event, which would periodically gather on an equal footing the participants in this new, wider Christian forum. At such meetings, representatives of the overwhelming majority of the world's Christians would at last

come together for prayer, discussion and exploration of future steps towards greater unity, a small echo from the future of the full conciliar reality for which we hope.[3]

In recent years the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC and various evangelical and Pentecostal bodies have established working relationships, and often send observers to each other's sessions. Such cordial ties will be renewed in Harare. Without this significant cooperation, the next step would not even be conceivable. But this new forum would move significantly beyond our practice of being guests in each other's institutions, towards establishing a genuine common ground for a new stage in the ecumenical movement. I believe the moment is ripe for such ventures. In my own country, the National Council of Churches has just voted to endorse exploration of a new, more inclusive ecumenical forum in the US. As a step in that direction, it has invited the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Association of Evangelicals and the Pentecostal Conference of North America to work together as equal partners in drafting a statement on "Living the Gospel in the US in the Third Millennium".[4]

When the founding delegates at the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 pledged "we intend to stay together", it was a courageous commitment to withstand the many trials that would test this modern quest for unity. We need that same commitment to each other now. *But our "we" is far from adequate.* The equivalently bold ecumenical pledge for Harare would be "we intend to come together". "We intend to come together"... with those who were no part of the original modern ecumenical movement, with those who provide the predominant Christian witness in places where WCC member churches are absent or weak, with the two-thirds of the world's Christians and the vast majority of the world's Christian poor who do not belong to the WCC. We intend to come together with the widest possible representation of Christians, so that in ecumenical life the full scope of Christian division may also be manifest. No collection of churches or Christians constitutes the ecumenical movement unless all the real and rending differences that unity must overcome are actively present within it. Only in such a context can we fruitfully address the new theological divisions – over mission and world religions, sexuality, culture, economics and social policy – which now have church-dividing power at the world confessional level. We should turn away from contentment with anything less.

No insular interest in Christian solidarity should divert us from care for the unity of all God's creation, for the task of healing divisions that wound all people. But how plausible is the commitment of our churches to care inclusively for the whole world, when we will not or cannot even face the divisions in our own family of faith, divisions which are themselves such an integral part of the destructive dynamics affecting the wider world as well? How plausible is that commitment, when a global concern for the poor stops short of full communion with the churches chosen *by* the Christian poor? If we are serious in affirming that the unity of the church is to serve the whole human community, then we can hardly shirk one task that would represent a concrete service Christians as such could render to neighbours caught up in our divisions, the task that is our unique responsibility: overcoming conflicts among Christians.

This involves a second kind of repentance for the WCC. It means we will have to turn away from another kind of ownership. We will have to turn from the confidence that we know God's plan for the world in terms both more generic, and more detailed, than those of either scripture or tradition. We need not modify our convictions if we are genuinely to engage with a wider Christian community than exists in the WCC.

But we will have to repent of imperialism inherent in our choice of which economic, cultural or political perspectives we accept – or do not accept – for "our" theologies. The WCC has many virtues. But surely our peculiar temptation is to suspect that, among Christians, we have special title to God's ecumenical movement and God's ministry of justice. The characteristic temptations of other Christian groups may be different, and some may want to argue they are worse. But we can only answer the call for ourselves.

The assembly must also hear the note of thanksgiving in its theme. The grace to turn away from the captivity to our own limited visions is already cause to rejoice. The WCC has often been the channel of just such grace for its members and for others. We can prayerfully expect that it will be so again during the eighth assembly. In that spirit we should rejoice, rejoicing for all the ways that the WCC has offered glory to God in faithful witness and in care for God's creation. We can be thankful for the WCC's special gifts, among which is the way that it has led Christians to remember to rejoice in all of God's activity in the entire creation. The WCC has blessed us with a fuller appreciation of the earth as the "household of God", a vision of the *missio Dei* in terms of God's consummating and loving will for the whole world, a vision of the eschatological wholeness and unity of God's saving purpose. So it is appropriate that this assembly find cause for thanksgiving in struggles for justice and human integrity whether they stem from churches or Christian organizations or not. We can rejoice that there are distinctive spiritual truths, piety and goodness in other religious traditions. We can rejoice that major steps towards Christian unity are taking place among churches and groups outside the WCC, as well as among those within.

I believe there is a special challenge for the WCC and its member churches to renew their joy in the distinctive mission of the church. The church participates in the *missio Dei*. We are called to work for the justice and peace of God's whole creation. But surely this is God's call to all creatures, and in these general terms is no unique feature of the church. Its special communion with God in that mission is a task that falls to no other human community: the witness to God's saving presence in Jesus Christ. God's mission, the kingdom of God, the eschatological consummation of creation – all are larger than our historical ecclesial communities. But the peculiar joy of the church's mission is to witness to the gospel with its scandal of particularity, the distinctive gift we have to share with the world. Mission requires a balance. We need humility about what God does in the world without the involvement of the historical churches. And we need passion for the task that is distinctively the church's work, and which cannot be done in isolation from the church (in the full sense of the church as the communion of saints): the witness to God's incarnation and redemption in Jesus Christ and the incorporation of believers into the communion with Christ that is lived out in eucharistic koinonia.

Towards an ecumenical vision rooted in the fullness of the church

Finally the assembly must place all its work within our larger hope. The World Council was founded in hope: hope for the unity of the church, for the healing of the world, and the spreading of the gospel. The substance of the hope was, in all three cases, the faithfulness of God to divine promise. We have hope in these often-faltering efforts because they are rooted in the one who has given us a foretaste of the fulfilment of creation. Our hope is that we may see ever more of that fullness realized.

In 1998 the three great hopes that animated the World Council's founders can be refined and renewed, and a fourth added. To seek the integration of all four, we must look to the unity in fullness of the church. It is too small a hope that the churches should someday cease to be divided, or that they should come to agree. Our hope is much greater than that. We hope that someday the church will be one not simply by subtracting its divisions but by living up to the stature of its wholeness, a fullness that is realized, as yet, for none of us. It comes through a working out of God's economy through history, in which the one church's fullness is increasingly manifest in all its richness and depth. The various movements we have discussed which flow within and without the WCC, converge in this vision. The varied efforts to bring justice and peace to creation, the dialogue among the confessional traditions of Christianity, the cultural variety in churches that results from a mission to all peoples, the clarification of Christianity and the appreciation for the wideness of God's activity that come from interreligious dialogue: each of these is a dimension through which the whole life of the church is discovered and realized.

We will live in deeper communion with God for having sought in every way to approximate God's justice and mercy. The devoted commitment to identify with struggles for human dignity and justice, for the reconciliation of hostilities, for the preservation of creation, in the confidence that God's Spirit is present in this work: all this maintains the biblical hope for the fulfilment of God's entire creation. It enriches every church with the challenge that God's salvation is a universal and cosmic reality. As a recent WCC consultation asked, "Is it enough to say that, if a church is not engaging responsibly with the ethical issues of its day, it is not being fully church? Must we not also say: if the churches are not engaging these ethical issues *together*, then *none of them individually is being fully church?*"[5] The urgency of this question points in two directions. Intense and responsible engagement with such issues will inevitably lead to solidarity with those outside the church who participate in the struggle for justice in similar ways. On the other hand, the need to engage the issues as church will inevitably draw us towards interaction with other Christians who may have very different, even conflicting approaches to this engagement.

We will live in a deeper communion with God finally because of the richness of Orthodox and Roman Catholic and Protestant and Pentecostal confessions, each of which has brought out elements of our shared scripture and tradition which would otherwise have remained lost, or muted, for the others. The Faith and Order process remains the primary means by which this richness is shared, providing resources for full communion, mutual recognition, cooperative relation and dialogue, so that all our churches may become more reformed, more catholic, more holy, more Spirit-filled. The hope to overcome Christianity's confessional divisions is as vital as ever, but it now has two crucial sides. One, as we have already noted, is the quest to expand the ecumenical discussion so that all of the burning contemporary divisions may be addressed: the breadth of our vision for unity must be matched by the breadth of conflict we are willing to face. The other side is perseverance in the fruitful work that has already brought us so far in these fifty years. At the world conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, thirty years and more of this work was summarized and the churches were challenged to use it as the basis for further steps towards unity.[6] These two faces represent the breadth and the depth of the hope for overcoming the divisions that prevent us from worshipping and confessing as one body.

We will live in deeper communion with God because of the witness of churches coming from many cultures and subcultures, for in each one new facets of the mysteries of God and the grace of Christ are discovered. Shared among the churches, these will be generally the resources for developing the most profound theology and ecclesiology possible, a theology and ecclesiology capable of encompassing our unity in diversity. We stand now only at the early stage of this process. The hope to spread the gospel into the entire world remains a living hope. And we realize increasingly that this hope is rooted not only in the desire to share Christ with others, but also in God's continuing witness to the church. The church does not "have" Christ or the gospel: in many ways we barely understand what has been revealed to us. As Christian communities grow from the gospel in ever more and varied cultural settings, each one has a universal witness to offer for all the other churches, so that the fullness of Christ in the trinitarian life of God is made ever more manifest to us. The process of evangelization involves a witness in word and deed that invites others to faith in Christ, and it also involves the continuing mutual evangelization of all Christians through the witness of the churches in their varying contexts, opening the way to the fuller depth and breadth of life in Christ.

And finally we will live in deeper communion with God through respectful and open dialogue with those of other religious traditions. As the Baar statement said, "It is our Christian faith in God which challenges us to take seriously the whole realm of religious plurality. We see this not so much as an obstacle to be overcome, but rather as an opportunity for deepening our encounter with God and with our neighbors as we await the fulfilment when 'God will be all in all'" (1 Cor. 15:28).[7] We can study and listen and converse with open hearts, not only as a means of knowing the persons who belong to these traditions, but as a means of hearing the witness of the distinctive claims and aims of these faiths. This dialogue not only fosters cooperation in healing the world's wounds but allows us to witness in a relation of mutuality. It profoundly expands our sense of Christianity's distinctive character, of God's presence in other traditions, and of the majesty and glory of a God whose providence may encompass these alternative religious aims.

These four movements are united because they are part of God's purpose and mission for the world. Insofar as the church is playing its distinctive role in that mission, the church is drawn into these movements and into the unity they prefigure. The ecumenical movement has advanced through ever-renewed and amplified visions of the nature of the unity we seek. The four "acts" make up one coherent ecumenical movement in which the unity we seek for the church is the same as the fullness of the church. The path to unity, then, goes through engagement with an expanded range of differences, each difference leading to an as-yet-unlocked dimension of the fullness of the whole, authentic church. If unity were something whose nature we could already define completely, these four projects might clash. But the four movements are essential, because the ecumenical movement lives both by the actualization of unity and by the continued discovery of further dimensions of unity yet to be realized.

Let us "Turn to God" and "rejoice in hope", longing for *all* the fullness of the body of Christ.

NOTES

[1] The draft document is "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches: A Working Draft for a Policy Statement", Nov. 1996. Its section on "Implications for the Revision of WCC Structures" was dropped in the September 1997 version of the policy statement.

[2] See "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches: A Working Draft for a Policy Statement", pp.29-30.

[3] On the other hand, within the WCC, the assembly could give way to a more concentrated process for governance, which would distribute the assembly's constitutional functions to other bodies or replace it with a much more modest meeting.

[4] "Reclaiming the Vision, Deepening Our Commitment, Expanding the Table: Report of the Ecclesiology Study Task Force", adopted by the general assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 13 Nov. 1997.

[5] Report of the consultation, from *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Costly Commitment*, presentations and reports from the World Council of Churches' consultation in Jerusalem, Nov. 1994, Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds, Geneva, WCC, 1995, para. 17(c), p.64.

[6] See *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Thomas F. Best and Gunther Gassmann, eds, Geneva, WCC, 1994.

[7] "Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations", a statement of the Baar Consultation, Jan. 1990, *Current Dialogue*, 19, Jan. 1991, p.49.

The Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

Ion Bria

An hermeneutical imperative

It is difficult for Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe to grasp the relevance of the theme of the WCC's eighth assembly, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", because the post-communist context in which they live is not yet well or deeply understood. Historians and politicians still speak of it only in terms of what is no more: the *collapse* of Soviet communism, the *end* of the cold war, the *failure* of state-socialism. While Central Europe begins to claim a new identity as a distinctive political power regrouping former communist countries close to Germany, the countries of Eastern Europe still face tremendous problems in coming to terms with their existence as nation-states and their transition to a neo-liberal market economy.

While the churches are searching for responses to the emerging challenges of the post-1989 situation, this effort is not yet undergirded by ecclesiological reflection taking account of a serious pastoral and cultural analysis. Meanwhile, conservative and nationalistic factions in these churches seek to treat the communist era as an historical parenthesis, and call for the restoration of the traditional values of the "true church" (that is, as it existed before the communist revolution). This prevents them from taking account of the serious consequences, institutional and cultural, of the communist experience. The political order, culture and civilization of the "post-communist world" cannot be defined by ignoring the factors that determined the profile of the churches at the end of the communist period. For example, the ecclesiastical geography of the Orthodox church in Eastern Europe is completely changed by the emergence of new independent states (in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) and new claims to be autonomous and autocephalous by churches in such places as Ukraine,

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Moldavia, Macedonia, Estonia and Albania. Each local church has its own language, tradition, synod, experience, history as a "national church". The recomposition of pan-Orthodox unity and fellowship, which is based on the "polyphony" of local churches, must take all these situations, diversities and styles of witness into consideration. In this conciliar fellowship of interdependent sister churches, no local church may claim to be the *centre* of Orthodoxy or *primus inter pares*. The voice of the next Orthodox synod is polyphonic.

In every church, the ecclesiastical authorities, especially the Holy Synod, have been publicly criticized from within their own ranks because they bypassed the critical issues raised by their own people during the communist regime. In many instances, the churches realized the danger of becoming clerical institutions out of touch with their people, but they were afraid to deal with this serious crisis. After 1989, the authorities have continued to give the impression of being unable to judge the positive and negative developments in the recent history of their churches – the continuities and discontinuities, personal resistance and collective perversion, all challenging conventional patterns. Today, the churches realize that they cannot go on postponing an honest dialogue and reconciliation with nation and society, but must prepare and educate their people to understand and to live in this post-communist world.

The results of fifty to seventy years of restrictions on evangelization and teaching and sometimes persecution are obvious: the secularization of former "Christian" societies, the ignorance of religion, the growth of a secular and alien culture. However, the current searching for God and spirituality – the so-called "return to religion" – does not mean a return to the church's discipline. It would be pretentious to speak of an Orthodox way of life and Orthodox social teaching when the churches are trying to recover their identity in a condition of post-modernity. The struggle for identity and the desire for faithfulness to the tradition must not blind the churches to their responsibility to maintain pastoral relations with people through every kind of disturbance and disagreement.

There is an explosion of anti-ecumenism in several churches in which conservative groups have pressed the authorities to withdraw from the World Council of Churches. The visit of WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser to the Russian Orthodox Church in January 1998 displayed the total lack of information and even distorted information at the popular level which has fed a growing hostility to the WCC. The deficit is not only in the understanding of the ecumenical movement as such, but also in the theological language for communication.

Among the Orthodox churches there are differences in levels of theological education and ecumenical formation. Some Orthodox churches have various external ecumenical priorities and local experiences. In other countries, the mission of the local church is less affected by the ecumenical movement. In some places, the ecumenical agenda is presented as contradicting specific confessional concerns. There may be disparities between the general declarations about common Christian witness and concrete and the specific actions of different local churches.

The *diaspora* of the Eastern European Orthodox churches have arisen out of very specific historical and geographical contexts; and the communities have tended to be held together by their ethnic, linguistic or social backgrounds. Due to the acute tension between allegiance to the mother churches and the political distance taken by a

distinct section called "exile church", the diaspora appeared to be absorbed in its own inward and often archaic life. Thus the diaspora experience appears not to offer much help for the present development of the home churches in Eastern Europe.

Identity and history in a changing world

Yet "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" can be a theme of paramount significance for churches living in the post-communist world. Not only is it an appeal to ecclesial identity and faithfulness to the responsibilities the church bears, but it is also a prayer that it may fulfill its commitment to God's service here and now: to announce the kingdom, to unfold God's history of love for the world, to tell the story of salvation in contemporary terms, to comfort and challenge God's people. God knows and will judge the weakness and sinfulness of the ecclesiastical authorities during the past period of trial. "Turn to God" is an appeal to recognize and cope with the church's humanity, its failures and strengths, to allow the Lord to transform and use it. The church is a body under scrutiny, watched by the faithful and by the world. Without integrity within itself, its ministry will lack credibility and effectiveness. "Turn to God" is a call to the church to accept suffering and hardship in the spirit of the Lord, in a spirit of humility which springs from awareness of its own humanity, fallibility and frailty.

The contemporary experience of Jesus Christ indicates that the balance between the church's *infallible authority* and its *humanity*, between its *eternal identity* and changing *human history* is often difficult and delicate. Let me illustrate this idea with some examples:

The sense of discontinuity of tradition. Under the communist regime, legal restrictions and moral pressures from within and outside the church disrupted the stability and continuity of the Orthodox tradition. The churches had to wrestle with these tensions while remaining rooted and sustained within their faithful community, sometimes by prophetic words and actions, sometimes even by political involvement. For a variety of political and pastoral reasons, there was a reluctance to tolerate openly dissident groups and movements. But this pastoral accommodation was more than an automatism. It involved understanding people and their relationships to the society, restraining some and encouraging others. A particular segment of the church community needing special care – the victims of the state violation of religious freedom – have been forgotten. There was a conflict between the different demands of the church's vocation; and the balance between its ontological and existential nature and its functional and missionary responsibility was ignored.

Now that this period is over, the problem is not only to recover the sense of mission in its full sense, but also to find new forms for transmitting the gospel, new ways for the faith in the light of the needs of the wider human community and the world. Concern for the evangelization of the society and care for the victims of exclusion and violence should be built into the church's structures. Thus the churches will come to a new understanding of Tradition as open and dynamic, capable of re-formation from time to time as fresh opportunities arise.

But, as noted earlier, many groups refuse to accept the historical evolution which has created a new situation in which to understand God's presence in history. In their eyes, the rejection of old Christian society and the war against Christian values mean the "communist experience" has neither theological nor epistemological value. The

only way to cope with this historical loss is to bring back into theological discussion and ecclesial practice the old paradigms and glorifications: Holy Russia, Holy Serbia, "the third Rome", the National Church. The key issue, however, is to preserve the identity of the church in relation to the actual history of the community of the people. Identity and history cannot be considered in isolation from each other: together they reflect the image of the church. Too often, however, the identity of the church is taken as a fixed entity, closing off debate and thus becoming a stumbling-block for the expectations of the younger generation. The church's task is to listen to the people and to learn from them, recognizing when change is necessary and when it is possible, helping the faithful to face the new situation.

"The triumphant church". The whole concept of a triumphant church – which in any case was a more cultural and political than theological title – is outdated. The emphasis has shifted from the church as a hierarchical institution to an institution whose service points beyond itself to Christ who sent his Spirit on the Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost in order to serve the world in the name of the Lord. As Nikos Nissiotis once wrote, "ecclesiology is a commentary on the operation of the Holy Spirit. Church structure, apostolic ministry and succession have to be interpreted through a charismatic pneumatology. Church orders are not *de jure* derived from divine 'potestas' or a pyramidal hierarchy, but are a communal event, a gift of grace to the ecclesia, which guarantees its authenticity"[1]

More exploration is needed of various ecclesiological corrections and emphases in recent times. An example is the emergence within the church itself of new movements, groups and associations which try to exercise their specific vocation in various areas of community life, especially through social outreach in civil society to meet such issues as poverty, disease, hunger, violence and human rights violations. Some of these new communities are incorporated into the mainstream of the church; others have persisted as separate groups. The polarization between movement and institution is real, but there is an opportunity here to practise the conciliar way in a new form, involving all, not only the ecclesiastical authorities. This raises the problem of internal organization of the church – how to build into the church's structures the concern for the new communities and movements.

The church is no longer at the centre of society. This may be a cultural problem, or a theological one, or both. Since the church has lost the official recognition as "national church", the citizens are not automatically members of it. They are not obliged to join the church because the emperor or the president has joined it. In a secular modern democratic state, civil society has lost its Christian identity *per se*, because it includes groups with various standards and values. This has serious implications for the understanding of the ministry of a majority church in relation to minorities.

The history of the church as pilgrimage. During the decades of religious restrictions, the churches accepted the exclusive concentration on the liturgical time and space as a measure of pastoral *oikonomia,* in order that it would be possible to give a witness. But this had its own limits. For a liturgical framework (worship, music, architecture) goes together with a particular culture, tradition, ethos and even sociological community. The language became esoteric, something only for insiders. The concern for those outside, the sense of an ecclesial solidarity with them, was lost. This requires an ecclesiological correction: the de-linking of the liturgy from an old imperial notion

of Christianity (corresponding to the imperial court ritual), and its understanding as a springboard for the people, the *laos*, in its pilgrimage. It is a paradox that many people do not see the Orthodox church as a democratically structured community of believers and an active factor in the evangelization of the new cultures.

Today the laity gives back to the church the sense of pilgrimage, of *koinonia*, of solidarity of all, according to the apostolic message that the baptized community constitutes a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 5:10). The place of women in community life is fundamental. The worship, in any case, is *their* worship, and the faithful are less concerned about the boundaries of the church, internal and external. "You are the salt of the earth..., you are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). The quasi-fundamentalistic fixation on the "limits" of the church in ecumenical conversations and the strictest interpretation of Cyprian's opinion that outside the church there is no salvation come from a lack of deep insight into the liturgical and missionary experience of the faithful. There should be no conflict between lay academies and official theological education, which is too often identified only with the order of seminaries and theological schools of those to be ordained to the ministry.

Political involvement. While some churches increasingly debate the issue of political engagement, others regard it as an ecclesiological impossibility. We are living in an age when old attitudes are being questioned in the face of the intense challenges posed by secularism, pluralism and materialism. Young people in the church today are asking how far the patterns and traditions of the past are determinative for the present and the future. For some of them, the social teaching of the Orthodox church is absent. The political message of the church is not taken for granted and the spiritual values are ignored or not practised on a regular basis. Fear, cynicism, violence, despair and indifference to marginalized people are all signs of the post-communist evolution. Alongside the many diaconal and educational programmes to develop its social outreach – Sunday schools, ministries in hospitals and with people with disabilities, humanitarian aid, defence of human rights – there is an increased pastoral alienation from the people whose aspirations may have to do with social status, ambitions, finance, sex, pleasure. It is good to recognize that all Christians suffer these moral pressures and also to say that not all are deceived into believing that the post-communist world holds all the answers.

The danger exists that the churches, in order to recover their institutional visibility and national privileges, will support anti-communist groups without questioning neo-liberal economic structures. The breakdown of the communist state economy has left Western liberal capitalism as the sole competitor for global leadership. A sense of purpose, direction and discipleship is required if the churches are to recapture a proper sense of moral authority and authenticity.

The ecumenical pressure. As mentioned earlier, many Orthodox voices have recently raised the issue of (non-)participation in the ecumenical movement in the light of a rise in traditionalist and fundamentalist movements and religious intolerance. The typology of the "undivided church" of the seven ecumenical councils, fidelity to the "apostolic faith" and responsibility for the whole church – all these qualities of the Orthodox witness appear to become stumbling blocks towards the visible unity of all Christians. But the majority of Orthodox churches are committed to give their ecumenical witness on the basis of truth and love, and to be open to sharing their gifts and receiving the gifts of others. That will not always be easy and acceptable, because

it challenges the vision of an exclusive and closed ecclesiology, not receptive to the insights of others.

Sometimes such self-confident groups are lacking in understanding of or education in ecumenism and church unity. But it is also clear in the post-communist world that Orthodox ecclesiology can be misunderstood and misinterpreted by the Orthodox themselves. They may focus so much on one stereotyped ecclesiology that they inhibit ecumenical debate. The churches however must be both faithful to the vernacular paradigms to which they belong and open to the unity of the whole church, responsive to ecumenical commitment alongside and over against their national, confessional and cultural identities. They will be aware of the ecumenical vision – "all in each place" (New Delhi) – and will act according to the Lund Principle of doing together everything except that which conscience forbids. They may seek more shared celebrations, for example in Advent, at Christmas, during Lent and at Pentecost.

Spiritual and structural renewal. In the prayer of ordination, the bishop invokes on the candidate "the divine grace that heals every weakness and supplies whatever is lacking". There is thus no justification for an ecclesiology that excludes the possibility of change and renewal. "Turn to God" is an appeal to see the church *in via* – carrying the *basileia*, the ultimate reality of the kingdom, in the midst of a contradictory human history. There are some who disapprove of talk about the "renewal of the church", since it creates the impression that the promises and gifts of the kingdom are not realized in the historical church. They identify renewal with innovation – and they have not found an appropriate way to distinguish between the holiness of the church and the sinfulness of the faithful. The church's life is then cut into different pieces because of a lack of understanding of its wholeness. Far from being settled or self-contained, the identity of the church is a dynamic reality, which is always under the judgment of God and the call of the gospel for *metanoia*. In the midst of human history, the Christian life remains a permanent invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*), who heals the brokenness of humanity and fills the emptiness of the human spirit.

In recent years, renewal has to a certain measure been associated with people, groups and movements whose gifts or vocations grow out of a special experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. Many have recognized the contribution of the charismatic movements, which see the history of the church in terms of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Renewal is built on and depends on the individual charism.

Renewal has also been relegated to the "outsiders", to groups or movements calling for changes in the power structure and institutional pattern of the church – liberation movements calling for "reinventing" the church, creating new forms of Christian communities, taking the way of resistance in facing the structures of injustice and poverty. Renewal is built on the idea that a contemporary "crisis" requires alternative structures and communities that are more relevant in their faithfulness to the gospel.

Renewal is also seen as the action of sensitive Christians who cannot tolerate comfort and conformism and give great importance to the quality of life as Christ's disciples. Renewal means reappropriating the energy people have received in becoming members of the body of Christ, hence the emphasis on the renewal of baptismal vows and the renewal of eucharistic piety. The local church will thus look for a renewal of its ecclesial identity in the practice of its faithfulness and will seek to express this more fully in its witness.

Recommitment to the eucharistic vision. "Turn to God" defines more than the continuity and faithfulness to our "ecumenical memory". It also expresses the reconciling task of holding the people of the churches together in one body, based on the biblical revelation that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). It highlights the essential discipleship and *koinonia* experienced in the eucharist. In the words of the WCC's Vancouver assembly (1983), "the *koinonia*, as it celebrates the eucharist, [is] the focal point of unity for all members of the body of Christ. Although full eucharistic fellowship is not yet possible, all nevertheless share in the 'eucharistic vision'" (WCC, Vancouver, 1983). This vision calls all Christians in the power of the Holy Spirit finally to transcend their differences and limitations and to come together around this central expression of their life.

Moving into the new millennium, the ecumenical movement must rely on the recommitment of the Orthodox churches. "Turn to God" speaks to them primarily of unfolding their liberated energies by the grace of God and entering into a deeper expression of the ecumenical communion. We should be thankful for the stimulus and challenge of the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, recognizing that just as they raise questions for us we will also want to raise questions with them.

NOTE

[1] "Orthodox Theological Education", in *Report on the Consultation on Theological Education*, Geneva, WCC, 1978, p.43.

"Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope"

Roman Catholic Perspectives for Harare and Beyond

Anton Houtepen

A common vision?

In their draft policy statement *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches* (CUV), the member churches of the WCC characterize themselves as a "a people of the resurrection, proclaiming joy and confidence, in the midst of exclusion and despair, life in all its fullness".[1] The document glorifies the "*one* ecumenical movement, inspired and guided by God's Spirit to move us towards making visible the unity which God has given us".[2] Similarly, the theme of the forthcoming Harare assembly invites all Christians to find a common joy and hope by *turning to God.*

This new theocentric approach to ecumenism is not in contradiction to the WCC's former insistence on such secular issues as the struggle against racism, poverty and discrimination or, more positively, for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Nor does it detract from earlier Christocentric or pneumatological approaches to the unity of the church, such as those of Nairobi or Canberra. The theme, I think, is a clear and positive pointer to the *salvific* character of ecumenism as a gift of God. The Harare assembly thus makes a clear connection with the theme of the first WCC assembly at Amsterdam in 1948: "Man's Disorder and God's Design". Ecumenism is not a voluntary "good work", from which Christians or churches could desist if they wished, but a central article of faith, God's will for the church. It is God's gift to divided and unreconciled people. Human goodwill, tolerance and consensus are powerful signs and instruments of God's good will for all humanity; these things are part of the gospel of Jesus Christ and fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

For Roman Catholics the theme sounds familiar. It could be an allusion to that great constitution *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)* of Vatican II, the climax of its *aggiornamento* and the rather forgotten "second charter" (after *Unitatis Redintegra-*

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tio) of Roman Catholic ecumenism. For *Gaudium et Spes* the goal of the ecumenical movement was not the internal convergence of the various Christian traditions and confessions as such, but rather their harmonious and non-contradictory witness about God's good will for humanity in today's world of science, technology, economics, ethics, politics, media, arts and entertainment. Such harmonious witness, aiming at solidarity and justice, joy and hope, demands serious dialogue and finding a common mind about all the issues causing controversy and injustice, fear, anger and despair in the world in which people really live – be they religious or a-religious, Christian or Muslim, woman or man.

If we would take the ecumenical charter of *Gaudium et Spes* seriously, we would need agreement about such life-issues as welfare and poverty, peace and power, participation and democracy, love and lust. Thirty years after Vatican II, we still need in the ecumenical movement a common position – a *Weltethos* – with regard to the great political, ethical and scientific dilemmas of today's world. The concentration of the ecumenical dialogues of the last thirty years on the internal ecclesiastical disputes of the past – *ecclesia ad intra* – has not been integrated with the many issues of Christian responsibility in world affairs and human behaviour – *ecclesia ad extra*. We badly need ecumenical dialogues in such fields as genetic engineering, fertility technology, human sexual behaviour, ecological threats, ethnic solidarity, migration policies, economic growth, the penal system (including the death penalty), and the worldwide problems of drug abuse, the drug trade and drug policies.

This question runs from Amsterdam right through to Harare: how do we understand our faith in God to be related to our ways of life and our value-systems? It is a good question – but how can we answer it without the full participation of the whole people of God? Can the "people of the resurrection" remain *divided witnesses*, as they presently are, about all these aspects of human life? A common answer of Christian churches in light of the Harare theme could only be: No! they cannot remain divided!

A common way?

We must concede the fact that nearly 50 years after its foundation in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches still represents no more than one third of world Christianity. A large and growing evangelical wing of Protestant Christianity follows its own, evangelistic path. The Roman Catholic communion of churches though claiming to be part of the "one ecumenical movement" and though ready to consider ecumenism as "a pastoral priority" and an official task of the bishops,[3] does not belong to the WCC. This in itself means that more than half of all Christians are outside the WCC's constituency.

The *CUV* policy statement speaks about "regular working relationships" of the Roman Catholic Church with the Council[4] and calls this church "an active participant and a valued partner".[5] Many would claim that such lofty words hide the fact that the fellowship of the World Council of Churches and of the Roman Catholic communion of churches are each impoverished by the absence of the other: not even the celebration of the Year 2000 could be done in common. This situation substantially harms the oneness of the ecumenical movement, not to mention the credibility of Christian mission. It makes true conciliarity, aiming at a common Christian witness, nearly impossible.

The historical and theological problems behind the hesitations about the fuller participation of the Roman Catholic Communion of Churches in the WCC are rather

obvious, and have been analyzed many times. One hesitation has been felt from the beginning in WCC circles: how to reconcile, and to pay equal tribute to, the so-called "Protestant" principle and the so-called "catholic" principle if such a large "catholic body" were to join the WCC, thus adding its weight to the Orthodox and Anglican perspectives? Would not the emphasis brought by these churches on matters of church structure (issues such as primacy, episcopacy and apostolic succession) "displace" the identity of the Reformation churches, which rely on the pure initiative of the word of God and the response of faith, and focus on the doctrine of justification by faith alone? Such hesitations have been perhaps enhanced by the growth of the evangelical movements towards the turn of the century, a growth posing a further question: how to relate to and reconcile with them at the same time as with the Roman Catholic Church?[6]

The second theological-historical reason for hesitation about Roman Catholic membership in the WCC came on the part of Roman Catholic authorities. Being a relative latecomer to the ecumenical movement – and that after years of opposition – this church had not actively contributed to the ecclesiological and strategic discussions leading to the foundation of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948. The Toronto Statement of 1950 was meant to make the participation of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic communions easier – Roman Catholic theologians even participated in drafting it – but "ecclesiological differences" remained a hindrance for membership. With the Second Vatican Council, its ecumenical attitude shifted from fierce opposition to warm collaboration. Several possible *patterns of relationship*[7] with the WCC, including the possibility of full Roman Catholic membership, were discussed at the WCC central committee meeting in Utrecht 1972. The only viable pattern thus far has proved to be that of a "growing collaboration and participation", which is controlled and guided by a Joint Working Group. Along with a number of joint ventures, such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, this has worked out fairly well in the area of theological dialogue, especially as pursued in the Faith and Order commission. Since 1967 the Roman Catholic Church has sent 12 official delegates to Faith and Order and has participated intensely in work undertaken through theological institutes and other areas where ecumenical expertise is focused. Roman Catholic-WCC collaboration has failed, however, in matters of common witness and programmes related to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Looking at the contribution thus far of the Roman Catholic Church to the one ecumenical movement (with its apparent failures and omissions), and taking the existence of the World Council of Churches as a gift of the Spirit to this century, and as a privileged instrument of that one ecumenical movement (while recognizing its deficiencies and failures), what would be feasible proposals for the more intense collaboration of these two bodies towards the WCC eighth assembly and the Year 2000? I see at least the following imminent possibilities and tasks.[8]

1. Updating the Toronto Statement and the Basis of the World Council of Churches

After so many important achievements in the ecumenical movement since Vatican II, after all the gifts of the Spirit manifested through ecumenical agreements and in expressions of solidarity, would it not be high time to look afresh at the two main consensus documents which made possible the foundation and coherence of the World Council of Churches, i.e. its *Basis* and the *Toronto Statement*? Could we, the World

Council's member churches and the Roman Catholic Church, not say *more* together now about the "ecclesial reality" of our dialogue partners than Toronto did? Must not the three statements on the goal of unity from New Delhi, Nairobi and Canberra be integrated into something like a *common Unitatis Redintegratio*, a common charter of Christian reconciliation and unity? Must not the general acceptance of the vision and practice of baptism and the eucharist, as resulting from the BEM reception process and "ratified" at the fifth world conference on Faith and Order (Santiago, 1993), have consequences for the Basis of the World Council of Churches? Why not add baptism, and the recognition of baptism, to the Basis, as well as the longing for eucharistic communion? Moreover, must not the commitment to JPIC, as expressed in the *Ten Affirmations* of Seoul, have consequences for membership in the World Council – and thus also be part of the Basis?

The work on such a charter of Christian reconciliation and unity, and on an expanded Basis of the World Council, would be an occasion to engage non-member churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, in a new *conciliar* commitment. Together and on a par with WCC member churches (who are the workers hired in the first hour), the Roman Catholic Church (being hired at a later hour – but by the same Lord of the vineyard!), could thus join in developing future structures of conciliarity.

2. Studying the criteria of true conciliarity and the positive possibilities of a Petrine ministry

The commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to the conciliar work of the World Council depends on there being common insights as to the meaning of true conciliarity and on the role of a Petrine ministry of service on behalf of the unity and universality of the church.

Faith and Order initiated, in the 1960s and 1970s, important studies on *Councils and the Ecumenical Movement*. The WCC Uppsala assembly (1968) dreamed of a "genuinely universal council" as the goal of all ecumenical work. At Nairobi in 1975 an Orthodox representative, Cyrille Argenti, requested that the next assembly be a genuine ecumenical council of all Christian communions. The assembly at Vancouver in 1983 issued a call to a worldwide Council of Peace and Justice. The *CUV* draft document stated:

> All Christian churches could be invited to declare – in a common act during the year 2000 celebrating the church's unity as gift and calling – that it is our solemn intention, by the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to move our relations to one another towards the day when an ecumenical council of the entire church of Jesus Christ, in the sense of the ancient undivided church, will take place. Such a declaration could be made at the highest level of authority in every Christian church, thereby giving the search for visible unity an ultimate seriousness. It should be repeated in every generation until the goal is attained.[9]

Such dreams and calls were and are, perhaps, unrealistic, "unripe". That should not mean, however, that churches play down the genuine conciliar value of the WCC, and even less that the WCC itself "water down" its representative and authoritative character as a provisional conciliar body – even if its decisions *do* have only "the authority of their own wisdom." Why not revise some functions of the WCC assem-

blies? And why not prepare for the exercise of these functions *together with* the Christian World Communions, including Rome? In the first draft of the policy statement *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision*, certain alterations were proposed: for example, to have a much smaller and more authoritative assembly, with more legislative power being given to the central committee.[10] Why not enhance the authority of the WCC presidents – who could be a modern equivalent of the old Pentarchy, if churches were prepared to give them such authority? In the proposals for a future structure, the presidents would be replaced by a regular meeting of church leaders and a "Forum" of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations. In these new structures, special attention should be given to enabling participation by the Roman Catholic Church and by evangelical and Pentecostal bodies, who are essential partners in the one ecumenical movement.[11]

And why not discuss that other "privileged instrument" of Christian unity (*Pastor Aeternus*, Vatican I) which is the Petrine ministry, historically given to the bishop of the city of the *martyrium Petri et Pauli*, but certainly adaptable to the needs of our time? In the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* Pope John Paul II has offered free discussion about the forms of such ministry. A first theological symposium on the issue sponsored by the Centro Pro Unione has taken place in Rome. Such initiatives ask for a follow-up.

Of course the World Council of Churches must act according to its Constitution. But its Constitution says that it may *call* the churches to the goal of visible unity. Such *calling* means more than merely registering what the churches want, or keeping peace with those who do *not* want something more than the ecumenical *status quo*.

3. The continuing reception of BEM

One of the most intriguing paradoxes of recent ecumenical history has been the contrast between the overwhelming enthusiasm for the Faith and Order text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in most of the member churches, and the low-profile *internal reception* thereof within the World Council itself. After the first enthusiasm for the "eucharistic vision" of the Lima text, expressed so powerfully by Vitaly Borovoy at the WCC Vancouver assembly in 1983, and the impressive celebration of the Lima liturgy at that time, the responses to BEM from the churches were never brought before an assembly. "Lima" – BEM – was completely absent from Canberra. Not even Faith and Order, which responded, at least, with a certain statement of gratitude, continued its own initiative; it decided, in its Budapest plenary commission meeting in 1989, to leave the texts as they are. The three "issues for further study" namely on hermeneutics, on the sacraments and on ecclesiology, still wait for implementation.[12] The "questions and proposals for elucidation" were not discussed at all. Many ongoing debates about ministry – the ordination of women, the nature of the episkope, the role of synods, the service of a Petrine ministry – are not part of the World Council's agenda.

Some voices are heard saying that this "consensus-work" is useless and counterproductive. The "BEM method" would enhance, some people say, the old confessional identities; consensus would impede the development of new and creative varieties of Christendom. The non-participation of the churches from Asia, Africa, Latin America would be the writing on the wall, saying that the controversies dealt with by BEM are no longer really relevant for the younger church-traditions.

Such reflections should lead to further, and positive, methodological improvement. I am sure that the Roman Catholic Church would not hesitate to declare its full sympathy, and deliver full cooperation, for the continuation of the BEM convergence process. Personally I feel that the paradoxical giving up of this initiative within the World Council has been one of the root causes for a certain distancing on the part of Rome before and after the Canberra assembly.

4. Organizing theological and intercultural exchange

One of the main factors in ecumenical progress is the exchange of theological reflection "in six continents". At the Canberra assembly proposals were made for the organization of such exchange through World Council channels. Better connections between the WCC and theological organizations like the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians (EATWOT) and the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), as well as regional associations of theologians such as Societas Oecumenica in Europe and the North American Academy of Ecumenists, would help involve theologians in ecumenical study and at the same time enable them to share their insights across cultural boundaries. The ecumenism of cultures and of local theologies would be one of the central new tasks of a conciliar body such as the WCC. The Roman Catholic Church, through its worldwide network of theological centres, would be well equipped to help organize that exchange.

Ecumenical education, which is the key and pathway to future reconciliation among the churches, has been one of the tasks of the World Council from the beginning. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has set similar priorities, as becomes clear in the *Ecumenical Directory* published in 1993. For a long time now Roman Catholic students have attended, and Roman Catholic teachers have been staff members at, the WCC's Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. But there could be more intense collaboration in staffing and programming, as is the case in various institutes for ecumenical education throughout the world (Bangalore, Dublin, Venice/Rome, Kampala, Sao Paulo, Utrecht, and others).

5. Further work on common witness within CWME

Ecumenical collaboration in mission has from the beginning been one of the main driving forces of the ecumenical movement. After Vatican II, Roman Catholic mission work underwent changes in methods and attitudes similar to those in other Christian communions: the understanding shifted from Western patronage towards mutual assistance of churches, from a Western dogmatic approach to one of dialogue and inculturation, from a focus on individual piety and education towards structural development, liturgical life and community-building.

Yet many new problems arose: the relation of gospel and culture is not simply a harmonious one. Sometimes prophetic criticism leads to persecution, as in situations of injustice and oppression; or trends in the culture may strongly oppose active Christian commitment, as in secularized societies. The Jewish background of the gospel itself must be rediscovered after ages of Greek and Roman interpretation, but such rereading of the Bible is not automatically convincing for, for example, Palestinian Christians. Syncretism may be a problem, but why is European syncretism acceptable – and why must Asian syncretism be rejected? How can mission and evangelism practise dialogue with people of other faiths without giving up their kerygmatic task of preaching the gospel? How must dialogue be organized on a global level?

All such problems Christians have in common. Isn't this a kairos moment of the Spirit, an opportunity to work together on these problems of common witness? Why not set up a Programme on Common Witness in the framework of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism? Why not combine the Roman Catholic Church's and the World Council of Churches' programmes on dialogue with living faiths? Why not apply the Faith and Order model of full Roman Catholic participation to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, where cooperation on the staff level has already been realized for some years and where mission studies in IAMS have been organized on an interconfessional basis for almost two decades?

6. Common work on church and society and JPIC

The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation experience has been an unhappy one with regard to Roman Catholic collaboration on a world level. The experiment of SODEPAX (1968-74) as a programme to organize common peace and development work between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church was a failure. Common diaconal and development programmes between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church have been rare. But the desperate situation faced by many victims of injustice, oppression, poverty and hunger cries out for more concerted study and action. The Roman Catholic Church has something to offer in this domain: a strong tradition of social teaching, a missionary tradition which knew of no opposition between faith and service, a theology of liberation, appealing to the prophetic tradition and to the Sermon on the Mount. It offers its tradition of religious life in convents and monasteries throughout the centuries. This religious life has been a living koinonia on the pattern of Acts 2 and 4, offered to the service of both the materially needy and the spiritually poor. The Roman Catholic Church would bring to its collaboration with other churches a worldwide network of relief agencies such as Caritas Internationalis and Cor Unum, assisted by many Roman Catholic development agencies in the local churches like Misereor, Aide à toute détresse and Solidaridad.

Roman Catholic advisors have participated in many Church and Society, the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development and JPIC projects and consultations. On the local, national and regional levels they work ecumenically in diaconal and development organizations, and in the commissions dealing with social questions in various of the national councils of churches. Again, wouldn't it be timely to follow the Faith and Order model of full participation by Roman Catholic delegates in a Commission on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), thereby involving the International Commission Justitia et Pax and Pax Christi, as well as the study group on social issues of the WCC-RCC Joint Working Group and other social-economic experts from Roman Catholic development agencies?

In view of the massive challenges posed by such matters as migration and refugees, nationalism and the practice of ethnic cleansing, issues of world population and world hunger, the greenhouse effect and other ecological threats, there would be quite an agenda: a *necessitas concilii* (Antonin of Florence) which is unprecedented in Christian history.

7. Fostering the community of women and men

The equal share of women and men in social and cultural life, and the emancipation and liberation of women from male and patriarchal domination, has come to be

seen within the ecumenical movement of the last three decades as part and parcel of Christian identity (cf. Gal. 3:28). In most Christian churches the socialization of the Christian gospel, catechesis and evangelism depend largely on women. In lay participation in parish life women bear the burden of the day. In some Christian communions decisions have been taken to admit women to all ordained ministries on an equal footing with men.

Here we are witness to a deep and serious new conflict within the Christian koinonia at large. Positions seem already rather fixed, before conciliar deliberations could even occur. A justified impatience from the side of women prevents seeing possibilities for gradual development, for example, through the practice of ordination to the diaconate and work on the deeper roots of the problem in the Old Testament imagery of the Levitic priesthood. Charges made of discrimination against women only harden their opponents against what these opponents see as "feminist aberrations" from God's order of creation.

While the World Council of Churches has the problem on its own plate through the opposing positions of its member churches, a common debate with the Roman Catholic Church would be another instance of a *necessitas concilii*. There was a time when such debate could have taken place within Faith and Order, to the advantage of all parties in the conflict.[13] But such beginnings as these were have not been continued and in the meantime the theological debate has been politicized and the churches have become polarized over the issue. Here, if anywhere, the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church could serve together the cause of Christian koinonia in a "conciliar experiment" in conflict-resolution according to the mind and method of the apostles (Acts 15). Apostolic continuity would be expressed in a new and unexpected way!

Conclusion

The current situation of global Christianity, the serious contribution of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement worldwide and these seven urgent issues which can only be solved in conciliar collaboration among all the Christian World Communions – all these factors call for closer collaboration between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. If, for the time being, membership of the Roman Catholic Church in the World Council of Churches is impossible, common conciliar programmes and deliberations are certainly feasible and potentially effective. Under the responsibility of the Joint Working Group, a Faith and Order-like model of Roman Catholic participation could be developed for the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and for the Unit on Justice, Peace and Creation. Financial support could be given from both sides on an equal basis.

In the context of widespread post-modern scepticism about any personal destiny beyond a happy life, and any goal of human history beyond an affluent society, Christianity and the other great religions have a much-needed therapeutic task to fulfil: to liberate people from fear and to restore the network of hope and joy once woven by the Creator of heaven and earth, and promised to all the blessed of the Lord who walk on the path of the Holy Spirit of God. This "network of hope and joy" is not the elusive by-product of some religious group-dynamics, but a tangible and visible pattern of solidarity which can liberate from fear and create human dignity across all boundaries of race, nationality, class or gender. It is called God's *covenant* in the Jewish scriptures, *umma* in the Qu'ran, koinonia in the Second Testament of the church of

Jesus Christ. This koinonia is not the delicate outcome of a human balance of power, but the result of God's policy and *basileia*: where people call upon God, and live according to the standards of God's kingdom, justice, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit of God will be their part (Rom. 14:17). We have walked along the same path, but on different journeys thus far; what would happen if we, as ecumenical pilgrims, decided to travel *together* towards the common "goal of our pilgrimage": *the household of God* (K. Raiser).

NOTES

[1] *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches*, WCC, Geneva 1996, pp.5-6. This text, hereafter cited as *CUV*, was sent to WCC member churches and ecumenical partners for response in November 1996; and on the basis of more than 150 such responses a revised version was adopoted by the central committee in September 1997 as a policy document. While some of the passages quoted in what follows were substantially modified in the final document (which will be discussed at the Harare assembly), it is evident that the issues they raise raise remain on the agenda of the WCC and the ecumenical movement.

[2] *Ibid*, p.13.

[3] See *Codex Iuris Canonici*, (CIC 1983), canon 755 § 1.

[4] *CUV*, p.7.

[5] *Ibid*, p.22.

[6] A remarkable phrase in this regard in *CUV* reads: "...*some* member churches of the WCC (...) believe that the fellowship of the WCC is impoverished by its absence..." (p.23). Apparently there are others who do not!

[7] A document with the title *Patterns of Relationship (The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 24, 1972, pp.266ff) was prepared in view of the central committee meeting at Utrecht 1972, but could not be discussed or adopted because the Roman Catholic authorities were not satisfied with the solutions suggested for the ecclesiological difficulties which then existed. In this report three possibilities for closer relations between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church were mentioned: the evolution of coordinated structures for increasing collaboration; the formation of a new fellowship, differently constituted; membership of the Roman Catholic Church in the WCC. About the second possibility, though finally rejected, three suggestions were made in the report: to recognize the World Council as an organization of confessional families, as a fellowship based on national or regional Christian councils, or as a fellowship of Christian movements and organizations. As each of those suggestions was then considered unadvisable, the emphasis of the report was on possible structures for RCC membership in the WCC. This proposal, however, could not prevail and only the first possibility was retained for development in what was called – logically but somewhat euphemistically – "increasing cooperation, collaboration and participation".

[8] For details about collaboration thus far I refer to my previous article on the theme of RCC-WCC relations, "Towards Conciliar Collaboration: The WCC and the Roman Catholic Communion of Churches", in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 40, 1988, pp.473-87. For the ecclesiological differences and difficulties, see my article: "The Roman Catholic Church and the One Ecumenical Movement", in *Exchange*, 26, 1997, pp.280-304.

[9] *CUV*, p.31-32.

[10] *Ibid.*, p.30.

[11] *Ibid.*, p.29.

[12] *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: The Process and the Responses*, Geneva, WCC, 1989.

[13] Cf. *The Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective*, Constance F. Parvey, ed., Geneva, WCC, 1980, recording the consultation on this theme held at Klingenthal in 1979.

Harare as Evangelical-Ecumenical *Kairos*

George Vandervelde

The theme of the WCC's eighth assembly, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", is music to evangelical ears. Yet for the large segments of evangelicalism which are not involved in the contemporary ecumenical movement the music will remain a distant melody, or resemble the "sounds of silence". The voices of these evangelicals will not be heard in Harare, nor will their ears pick up the strains of this jubilee theme. In this essay, I shall reflect on the assembly theme from the viewpoint of evangelicals who are not directly involved in the WCC in order to consider the mutual challenge of greater evangelical-ecumenical engagement. I shall do so by examining conversion as a missiological issue, placing it in the framework of jubilee and within the context of the policy statement "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches", adopted by the WCC central committee in 1997.

To the extent that they are used to suggest mutually exclusive categories, the terms "ecumenical" and "evangelical" are highly misleading. Evangelicalism represents a broad range of Christians, including many who belong to churches that are members of the WCC. It is not accurate, therefore, to describe evangelicalism and the WCC as clearly circumscribed and separated groups. Nevertheless, a sizeable group of evangelicals are suspicious of, if not hostile to, the WCC and therefore remain aloof. The World Council's repeated calls, especially at Canberra, for a deeper engagement with evangelical and Pentecostal groups[1] testify to the present degree of non-engagement. The recent Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) text again expresses the desire for a deeper involvement of evangelicals in the WCC (4.12).

A surprising imbalance

While the Council's call for closer relations with evangelicals goes largely unheeded, this cannot be ascribed simply to an evangelical penchant for isolation. A striking recent development is the evangelical engagement with Roman Catholicism. From 1977 to 1984 an extensive dialogue took place between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical leaders concerning mission.[2] Simultaneously, a task force appointed by the World Evangelical Fellowship engaged in an extensive assessment of

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Roman Catholicism, prompted by "a potentially divisive difference of opinion among evangelicals" which surfaced at the 1980 WEF general assembly.[3] The latter document is more polemical and critical; yet the fact that the WEF embarked on this venture at all reflects a commitment to serious examination of contemporary Roman Catholicism. Moreover, the WEF Task Force on Ecumenical Issues, originally appointed in 1980, is now engaged in direct conversations with the Roman Catholic Church. It met in 1993 with representatives of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity to discuss the issues of justification by faith and Scripture and Tradition; and a second consultation, on ecclesiology and mission, took place in October 1997.[4]

Further evidence of the serious evangelical engagement with Roman Catholicism comes from the unofficial but high-profile discussions taking place in the United States, which produced the statement "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium"(ECT).[5] Though prompted by common concerns in the socio-political arena, the ECT project does not intend a purely pragmatic co-belligerency. Expanding on the common faith affirmations in the initial statement, the ECT group recently produced a statement devoted entirely to soteriology entitled, "The Gift of Salvation".[6] While unofficial, the ECT process has clearly been facilitated by official bilaterals, including the well-known dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the US and, perhaps more importantly, that between Southern Baptists and the Roman Catholic Church.[7] Surveying these developments, a Roman Catholic theologian speaks of "signs of progress".[8]

This is not to suggest that no engagement takes place with the WCC. The WEF Task Force on Ecumenical Issues has officially responded to the Faith and Order texts on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* and to the Apostolic Faith study, *Confessing the One Faith*; and several direct consultations between evangelicals and the WCC have taken place.[9] I recount this imbalance between evangelical engagement with the Roman Catholic Church and with the WCC in order to banish the stereotype of evangelicals as simply isolationist and to highlight the surprising nature of this development, given the virulent "anti-Roman" attitude frequently displayed and in many evangelical quarters still strong. The WEF Task Force on Ecumenical Issues was born amidst the furor prompted by even a minimal acknowledgment of Roman Catholicism at a WEF assembly.[10] That such sentiments are not a thing of the past is evidenced by the heated debate which the ECT process generated among evangelicals, forcing some prominent evangelicals to withdraw their earlier endorsement of the statement.[11]

In view of these polemics, one might expect that evangelicals would consider fellow Protestants in the ecumenical movement to be more fitting discussion partners than members of the Roman Catholic Church.[12] But rather than elaborating the reasons for the seemingly disproportionate evangelical engagement with the Roman Catholic Church, I shall turn to the Harare theme and framework in the context of the CUV process, in order to highlight the challenge this moment presents to evangelical-ecumenical relations.

Conversion – within and beyond

As suggested earlier, one could hardly find an assembly theme more likely to engage evangelicals than one which gives pride of place to the call for conversion, which touches on the heart of evangelicalism. In fact, a decade ago the WEF and the

Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization sponsored a consultation in Hong Kong devoted entirely to the topic of conversion, and the title of the work commissioned to synthesize the Hong Kong deliberations comes uncannily close to the Harare theme: *Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World.*[13]

The introduction to the Hong Kong statement calls conversion "one of the hallmarks of evangelical Christianity".[14] This is not of course to suggest that evangelicalism has a monopoly on this notion, let alone the reality to which it refers. The Hong Kong statement explicitly recognizes that conversion has been part of the Christian tradition throughout history.[15] What distinguishes evangelicalism is the central place it gives to the personal dimension of conversion as well as its missionary implication. Having its birth in pietism and the 18th- and 19th-century Awakenings, evangelicalism rediscovered the centrality and urgency of conversion. The further articulation of the nature of this rediscovery confronts one immediately with the challenge that evangelicalism presents to ecumenism.

The Hong Kong statement lifts up two features of the evangelical rediscovery. The first has an internal, ecclesial focus. The statement emphasizes the "personal" nature of conversion and relates it to the issue of "nominal" church membership. The revival movements were aimed at awakening the churches from their dormant state. "Through many revival movements God stirred up the churches from their dormant state and spiritually regenerated their members."[16] The contemporary charge of proselytism levelled, not exclusively but certainly centrally, against many evangelical (and Pentecostal) activities is closely related to this concern about "nominal" Christianity and dormant churches. Identifying this highly volatile issue may be sufficient for some to declare the evangelical challenge an issue too thorny to be accommodated, even within the ecumenical vision of inclusiveness. This would be highly unfortunate, for the problem of proselytism is not eliminated but rather exacerbated by ecumenical exclusion. An open examination of the lack of vitality that plagues many churches may lead to the revitalization not only of those churches but also of the ecumenical movement. At the fifth world conference on Faith and Order, WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser spoke of the "deep uncertainty and spiritual paralysis" that has gripped "the very churches which brought the World Council of Churches into being".[17] But aside from the ecumenical situation, the origin of evangelicalism in revival movements inescapably brings with it the focus on the need for personal conversion for those who are considered "nominal" members of the Christian church.[18]

A second feature of the evangelical emphasis on conversion concerns those outside the church. In evangelicalism "conversion" highlights the need for mission, understood as the call to all people to "turn to God". Accordingly, the Hong Kong theme in full was "The Consultation on Conversion and World Evangelization". The report points out that the evangelical revival movement "emphasized the centrality of conversion in the church's saving ministry to the world", leading to the establishment of "new, self-propagating churches in all continents and cultures".[19] It decries the fact that large sectors of Christianity fail to heed the "biblical mandate of calling on people everywhere to be converted", substituting "other forms of Christian involvement in the world, such as working for a humanization of the socio-political structures that impoverish the masses, or engaging oneself in a give-and-take dialogue with the members of other religions and ideologies, in view of a mutual enrichment and the forging of a wider, multi-cultural and multi-religious human fellowship".[20]

It is not far-fetched to assume that this latter comment has in view, among others, the World Council of Churches.[21] And one could expect spokespersons for the Council to reject such criticism out of hand as far too simplistic and rooted in an unbiblical dichotomy between the call to evangelism and the task of seeking justice. Both the stereotypes and the dismissive reactions perpetuate the stalemate, exacerbate division and injure Christ's mission. Moreover both within the evangelical movement and the ecumenical movement the struggle for deeper theological integration and holistic approaches to the calling of the church are in evidence. The WCC's struggles with these issues have been traced in various places;[22] here I shall review briefly some evangelical developments in this regard.

A convergence in holistic mission

The 1974 *Lausanne Covenant*, which many would regard as the *magna carta* of contemporary evangelicalism, is an affirmation of evangelical faith and an explication of and recommitment to mission.[23] The full theme of the congress which produced this statement again underscores its focus on evangelism: "The International Congress on World Evangelization". Before examining the universal scope of this commitment, we shall sketch the understanding of evangelization in relation to the struggle for social justice.

As noted earlier, evangelicals have frequently criticized the ecumenical movement for substituting social action for evangelism. Lausanne refused to be caught in a polemical stance against other Christian traditions. In fact, it acknowledges its own failings in relation to the understanding and practice of mission. The *Lausanne Covenant* confesses the harmful effect of "sinful individualism and needless duplication" (para. 7). Commenting on this document two decades later, its principal author John Stott again rued "our evangelical tendency to individualism and empire building".[24] This individualism clearly has an ecclesiological dimension, but it also leads to a focus on mission primarily as evangelization, understood as verbal proclamation aimed at personal conversion and individual commitments to Christ. While proceeding from this tradition in its definition of evangelization, Lausanne attempts to overcome the latent dichotomy between evangelism and what it frequently refers to as "social responsibility". The *Lausanne Covenant* expresses penitence for evangelical neglect of social justice and for "sometimes having regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive" (para. 5).

Although Lausanne represented a significant advance over earlier evangelical statements on evangelism and social involvement made at the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin,[25] the *Lausanne Covenant* did not move much beyond a "both-and" formulations, while insisting that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" (para. 6).

The lingering problem entailed in this both-and is to treat as optional that which by implication is secondary. Such serious misgivings did this incipient dualism engender that a group of participants of the Lausanne Congress issued a statement on "Theological Implications of Radical Discipleship".[26] The title indicates that this group wished to avoid juxtaposing evangelism and social responsibility in a way that would allow assigning priority to one or the other. Rather than stating that the gospel has "inescapable social implications", as the *Lausanne Covenant* does, the radical discipleship group proceeds from actual life in Christ, from the root of discipleship,

which in turn it places in the framework of the kingdom.[27] From this perspective the statement vehemently rejects the very suggestion that a dilemma exists between two responsibilities: "There are times when our communication may be by attitude and action only, and times when the spoken word will stand alone; but we must reject as demonic the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social action."[28]

Stott's retrospective reflection on the struggle over the place of social action is illuminating: "Looking back over some twenty-five years of debate over the relation between evangelism and social activity, it is really extraordinary that the controversy ever arose."[29] Though subsequent consultations again grappled with the relation of social involvement to evangelization, the issue found no satisfactory resolution.[30] In fact, further development towards a deeper vision of the integrity of Christian mission took place through the interaction of various traditions which converged in the WCC's landmark 1982 statement *Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation*.[31]

A call for reaffirmation

With a view to the relation of evangelicals to the Council, it is opportune that the Harare assembly, with its call to "conversion" in pivotal position, will revisit the *Mission and Evangelism* statement. After all, this statement itself is evidence of a high degree of convergence between ecumenical and evangelical approaches to mission.[32] Although the statement is not to be revised but rather updated in view of new developments, the nature of this updating will be of crucial importance to evangelicals, especially at two interrelated points. The first concerns what might be called the depth-dimension of the salvation proffered in mission; the other concerns the universal scope of the gospel.

The 1982 statement manages to keep in view the socio-political, even cosmic breadth of salvation, while at the same time accentuating its depth. This profound biblical tone is clear from the very opening lines of its preface:

> The biblical promise of a new earth and a new heaven where love, peace and justice will prevail (Ps. 85:7; Isa. 32:17-18; 65:15-25; Rev. 21:1-2) invites our actions as Christians in history. The contrast of that vision with the reality of today reveals the monstrosity of human sin, the evil unleashed by the rejection of God's liberating will for humankind. Sin, alienating persons from God, neighbour and nature, is found both in individual and corporate forms, both in the slavery of the human will and in social, political and economic structures of domination and dependence.

The prevailing understanding of sin as fundamentally rejection of and alienation from God resounds as if this were an echo of the *Lausanne Covenant*. An even more striking resemblance between the two is the sense of urgency of reaching all people with the good news:

> The church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and our neighbours through Jesus Christ. This evangelistic calling has a new urgency today. In a world where the number of people who have no opportunity to know the story of Jesus is growing steadily, *how necessary it is to multiply the witnessing vocation of the church.*

Here too the description of the specific meaning of evangelism is entirely compatible with the description contained in the *Lausanne Covenant* (para. 4), while the

urgency underscored here is elaborated in a separate section in the Lausanne document (para. 9).

The challenges which John Stott presented to the WCC's fifth assembly (Nairobi 1975) seem to be reflected in *Mission and Evangelism*. Responding to a plenary presentation by Mortimer Arias, Stott worried that in the WCC "evangelism has now become largely eclipsed by the quest for social and political liberation". He spoke of five things which "all of us, including the World Council, need to recover". Two of these may no doubt be considered as correlates: "a recognition of the lostness of man" and "a sense of urgency about evangelism".[33] *Mission and Evangelism* asserts that the cross, where Christ took "upon himself the guilt even of those who crucified him..., uncovers the lostness of the world, the magnitude of human sinfulness, the tragedy of human alienation" (para. 8). Moreover, the first subsection under the heading "Ecumenical Convictions", within which the participating WCC churches "covenant to work for the kingdom of God", deals rather extensively with "conversion". It opens by speaking in almost "evangelical" fashion of the nature of preaching:

> The proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of service (para. 10).

Further, *Mission and Evangelism* posits the universal claim of the gospel: "Each person is entitled to hear the good news" (para. 10) and "Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people" (para. 41).

These are strains that resonate in evangelical hearts. I single them out to underscore the great significance the discussion around the updating of *Mission and Evangelism* will have for the potential of greater evangelical engagement in the ecumenical movement. If the CUV call to evangelicals for greater involvement in the Council is to have any chance of being entertained seriously, the future status of *Mission and Evangelism* is of critical import. It is possible, however, to update *Mission and Evangelism* in such a way as simply to move beyond it, perhaps giving it a polite nod. The potential of benign neglect of the core of the 1982 statement is great because the new challenges posed by globalization, pluralism, and fragmentation are so complex and entail such pressing socio-political issues that these could easily eclipse the "evangelical" dimensions of *Mission and Evangelism*.[34] A largely formal "affirmation" of the 1982 document – though intended not to bury but to praise it – would be disastrous for evangelical-ecumenical relations. It would signal that, while this statement may represent a high point in the WCC commitment to mission, with at its core "evangelization", it is a peak that the World Council has now passed.

The WCC's 1996 world conference on mission and evangelism in Brazil reaffirmed the challenge which the truth of the gospel presents to all areas of life, going on to say: "We therefore commit ourselves to unequivocal and cooperative witness to the gospel of hope in Jesus Christ in all contexts".[35] Since the focus of the conference comes to expression in its theme, "Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures", we may assume that "all contexts" here refers to all cultures, thus reaffirming the universal claim of the gospel. In keeping with that thrust, the late Bishop Lesslie Newbigin proposed that after the words "all contexts", this clause be added: "so that all may come to know and love Jesus." These few words capture not only the heart of

evangelicalism but also the core of the *Mission and Evangelism* statement. For greater evangelical involvement in the ecumenical movement to take place, therefore, it is of crucial importance that the Harare assembly comes to a fresh affirmation of the ecumenical commitment to mission in unity.

Clarity regarding the nature and urgency of mission must not be sought solely in order to reach out to evangelicals. The entire ecumenical movement was born in and has been borne by the missionary movement. Stripped of caricature, polemics and antiquarianism, evangelical concern about the place of mission in the ecumenical movement represents a living reminder of the matrix, soul and criterion of authentic ecumenism. Accordingly, the CUV document maintains that the ecumenical movement "is committed to the search for visible unity, not as an end in itself but in order to give credible witness 'so that the world may believe' and to serve the healing of the human community and the wholeness of God's entire creation" (2.8). As *Mission and Evangelism* insists, "Evangelization is the test of our ecumenical vocation" (para. 1).[36]

Jubilee – promise and peril

If conversion and hope provide the two foci of the eighth assembly theme, jubilee traces the ellipse that marks out the new reality inaugurated in Jesus Christ. The concreteness of jubilee – the cancellation of debt, the liberation of slaves, the restoration of people's homes and livelihood – serves to anchor conversion and hope in the realities of our world.[37] Yet, while the jubilee theme holds great promise, it also courts peril, one that could greatly exacerbate evangelical-ecumenical tensions.

The peril lies in reducing the notion of jubilee to its social, economic and political elements. Jubilee then provides the springboard for all manner of political activism bereft of biblical-theological grounding. It is therefore critically important to keep the jubilee framework from breaking loose from its biblical moorings. The social-political elements of jubilee are indeed so startling – and our penchant to run immediately with these to the agonizing global issues of our time so strong – that the integrity of jubilee is broken.

Because the "reversal" in society envisaged in the year of jubilee is given such high profile in the Leviticus 25 passage, it is easy to run past the pointers to an integrating centre. In fact, the seemingly random scattering of some of these pointers heightens the impression of their practical irrelevance. The motivation for not regarding land as a commodity to be hoarded as a private possession is well-known: "For the land is mine" (v.23). But what are we to make of the repeated irruption into these practical structural re-arrangements of the call to "fear your God" (vv.17, 36, 43), or of the reminder that "I am the Lord your God" (v.17)? Or is it only through our Western activist eyes that these motifs appear as irruptions? Are they in fact the threads that hold the entire full reality of jubilee together?

This possibility seems confirmed by the way in which Leviticus "frames" the jubilee. The jubilee begins on the day of atonement. In fact the name for this year is derived from the ram's horn (*yobel*) which signals the start of the jubilee. The *year* of jubilee is inaugurated by the *day* of atonement (v.9). The restoration of just relations is anchored in the liturgical enactment of reconciliation, forgiveness – the presence of YHWH. If the opening frame centres jubilee in liturgical reconciliation, the closing frame places this new beginning in the context of lived reconciliation. The year of jubilee rests on the foundation of liberation not simply as emancipation, as being set

free, but as redemption, as being placed in a unique relationship with God, being in a sense "owned" by God. The instructions on the jubilee year conclude by forcefully underlining God's proprietary relationship, not simply to land, but to these *people:* "For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (v.55). Liberation, also that of the year of jubilee, is rooted in and qualified by redemption.

This redemptive undertone plays itself out dramatically when Jesus evokes the strains of jubilee in his home town. The Luke 4 passage has been characterized aptly as a "messianic manifesto". In summoning the notion of jubilee, Jesus points unmistakably to concrete acts of justice, liberation, release, healing. To spiritualize this new beginning in such a way as to remove it from the realities of oppression, abuse, domination and physical destitution is to run away from the story. On the other hand, it is precisely the recognition of the socio-political thrust of Jesus' announcement in Nazareth which leads others to run away from the story in the opposite direction. Contemporary appeals to this passage to bolster particular political programmes are constantly subject to the danger of taking a shortcut akin to that of the listeners in Luke's account.

Pinpointing the ravages of oppression, poverty and disease, Jesus announces the restoration and renewal represented by the year of jubilee. The strange and offensive turn in the story lies in what Jesus does next: having electrified his audience with the startling announcement, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus sits down! There is no follow-through, no plan for concrete engagement in the struggle; not even a visible sign of the miracle of the breakthrough of the new era; no strategizing about next steps; only the perfect tense: "*has been* fulfilled". Of that longed-for realization, there is nothing to be seen; it is fulfilled in their "*hearing*." Yet the rumours which had preceded Jesus had primed everyone to expect to see that which, for all too long, no eye had seen.

Jesus' listeners in Nazareth were no doubt more than ready to run with the messianic mission. But the mission entailed in the manifesto shudders to a jarring stop. It seems not even to get off the ground. A searing contradiction burns between the announcement and the (in)action, between the manifesto and the follow-through, between *eyes* fixed on an immobile Jesus and *ears* flooded with sounds of fulfilment. Yet this clash between sight and sound provides the puzzling clue to the story. In the vacuum of inaction, the audience lurches between hearing and seeing, hearing fulfilment, seeing only the one on whom their eyes are fixed. The core of this messianic manifesto, then, concerns the relation between the mission and the Messiah. The story forces the listeners and the readers to come to terms with the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.[38]

In appealing to this passage, contemporary activism, like its first-century counterparts, is in danger of running past or over essential dimensions of the messianic manifesto. The transformation of socio-economic relations entailed in the year of jubilee and the address to the poor are singled out as pre-eminently relevant to the mission of the church today – as indeed they are. To spiritualize or eschatologize the references to oppression, liberation, poverty and healing is to violate the text. But to run with the mission elements of the manifesto while missing their convergence in the Messiah and the call for allegiance to him equally violates the text. The good news for the poor is indeed good news *versus* the bad news of de-humanizing poverty, but it *is* good news

– gospel that is "proclaimed" and enacted – only in inextricable relationship to the call to know this *meshuach*.

The penchant either to run away with a Messiah severed from his concrete mission or to run away with a mission severed from the Messiah demonstrates that "evangelicals" and "ecumenicals" need one another. This urgent need gives force to the warning issued by Peter Hocken: "If this ecumenical/non-ecumenical divide is not addressed and bridged, the Christian world could end up as divided as ever, even if major headway is made between churches within the ecumenical camp."[39] This continuing divide between the ecumenical movement and large sectors of evangelicalism is devastating, not only for the unity of the church as such, but more pointedly for the church-in-mission. Judging that "the healthy balance between the ecumenical and the evangelical dimensions with which the World Council of Churches was organized in 1948 has gradually been lost", the Argentine evangelical theologian René Padilla has issued the challenge of a radical conversion, one that is both evangelical and ecumenical:

> If the mission of the church is the mission of the reign of God it must be both evangelical and ecumenical at the same time. Evangelical because it proclaims the good news of the inbreaking of a new reality in history through Jesus Christ, and calls individuals and nations to return from their idols to the true and living God. Ecumenical because it has the "universal" Christian community as its horizon, through which God wishes to demonstrate his love and justice to all the nations. It must be evangelical and ecumenical in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, for the sake of a better world, and to the glory of God.[40]

The Harare theme, especially within the jubilee horizon, the revisiting of the mission of the church in our time and the revisioning of the role of the WCC, make the eighth assembly an opportune and critical time for facing the challenge of reclaiming the integral link between the evangelical and ecumenical dimensions and deepening and broadening evangelical-ecumenical relations.

NOTES

[1] See Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report of the Seventh Assembly*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 107-108, 177.

[2] Basil Meeking and John Stott, eds, *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986.

[3] Paul Schrotenboer, ed., *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988, pp.8f.

[4] For the papers of the first consultation, see *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 21, 1997, pp.101-54.

[5] The text is published in Charles Colson and Richard Neuhaus, eds, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Towards a Common Mission*, Dallas, Word, 1995, pp.xv-xxxiii.

[6] Cf. *First Things*, no. 79, Jan. 1998, pp.20-23; *Christianity Today*, Vol. 41, 8 Dec. 1997, pp.35-38.

[7] See Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, eds, *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*, New York, Paulist, 1989, pp.39-51.

[8] Thomas P. Rausch, "Catholic-Evangelical Relations: Signs of Progress", *One in Christ*, Vol. 32, 1996, pp.40-52. The relative preponderance of engagement with Roman Catholicism is even more marked in the case of Pentecostalism; for a recent review, see Kilian McDonnell, "Five Defining Issues: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue", *Pneuma*, Vol. 17, 1995, pp.175-88.

[9] Cf. "An Evangelical Response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 13, 1989, pp.291-313; *Confessing the One Faith*: An Evangelical Response, *ibid.*, Vol. 18, 1994, pp.35-46. On WCC-evangelical encounters, see Thomas F. Best, *Vancouver to Canberra 1983-1990*, Geneva,

WCC, 1990, pp.12-13; Marlin VanElderen, "Building Bridges," *One World*, no.192, Jan. 1994, pp.8-11; Marlin VanElderen and Wesley Granberg Michaelson, "A Kairos for Evangelical-Ecumenical Relations? Reflections after Canberra", *International Review of Mission,* Vol. 81, 1992, pp.409-14.

[10] See Paul Schrotenboer's preface, *op. cit.*, pp.7-12.

[11] R.C. Sproul suggested that the initial ECT statement was tantamount to a betrayal of the gospel; *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995, pp.43-44, 191; more cautiously, Kenneth S. Kantzer expressed the fear that it glossed over essential differences on key points of doctrine, especially justification by faith; *Christianity Today*, Vol. 38, 18 July 1994, p.17. One of the more prominent evangelical participants in the ECT consultations, J.I. Packer, was surprised by "the violence of initial negative Protestant reaction"; "Why I Signed It", *ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1994, p.34.

[12] On relations between evangelicals and Orthodox member churches of the WCC, see Huibert Van Beek and Georges Lemopoulos, eds, *Proclaiming Christ Today: Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation, Alexandria, 10-15 July 1995*, Geneva, WCC, n.d.

[13] Grand Rapids, Baker, 1989, 1997; for the report see "The Hong Kong Call to Conversion," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 16, 1992, pp.262-70.

[14] *Ibid.*, p.262.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Konrad Raiser, "The Future of the WCC and the Role of Faith and Order within the Ecumenical Movement", in Günther Gassmann and Thomas F. Best, eds, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (official report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order), Geneva, WCC, 1994, p.170. In dealing explicitly with "proselytism", the conference report implicitly acknowledges the problem within churches which opens the door to so-called proselytism: "Wherever churches show spiritual vitality in faith, life and witness, it seems that coercion, manipulation and proselytism generally fail" (*ibid.*, p.257).

[18] The criteria employed to distinguish between "nominal" and "authentic" membership is an issue that makes mutual dialogue all the more urgent; on this see "Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and Evangelism", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 86, 1997, pp.463-73, esp. p.469.

[19] *Loc. cit.*, p.262.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.263.

[21] David Wells explicitly contrasts the evangelical understanding of conversion with "popular ecumenical trends", namely "social gospel theologies" and pluralist approaches to other religions; cf. *Turning to God*, pp.15-20.

[22] Cf., for example, Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds, *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, Geneva, WCC, 1997.

[23] For the text see James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization, 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1992, pp.253-59.

[24] John Stott, "Twenty Years After Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol.19, 1995, p.53; his immediate reference here is to the "most unseemly scramble of Western missionary organizations" into countries formerly under communist rule.

[25] See Carl F.H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, eds, *One Race, One Gospel, One Task: Official Reference Volumes: Papers and Reports*, 2 vols, Minneapolis, World Wide Publications, 1967.

[26] In J.D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear his Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*, Minneapolis, World Wide Publications, 1975, pp.1294-96.

[27] This emphasis was intended as an elucidation rather than a repudiation, of the *Lausanne Covenant* statement that "in issuing the gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship" (para. 4).

[28] Douglas, *op. cit.*, p.1294.

[29] *Loc. cit.*, p.54.

[30] See especially "Consultation on the Relation of Evangelism and Social Responsibility" (Grand Rapids 1982), in John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996, pp. 165-210. Cf. also Valdir R. Steuernagel, "Social Concern and Evangelization: The Journey of the Lausanne Movement", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 15, 1991, pp.53-56; Athol Gill, "Christian Social Responsibility", in C. René Padilla, ed., *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978, pp.87-102.

[31] Published among other places in Scherer and Bevans, *op. cit.*, pp.36-51.

[32] Granberg-Michaelson and VanElderen report that a "professor at an evangelical seminary in North America has told us that this statement is one of several (including one from an evangelical body) he has given to his classes, unmarked. After reading all of them, the students are asked which statement gives the

best perspective on the task of mission; and it is regularly the WCC statement that gets the most votes" (*loc. cit.*, p.410).

[33] See *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 65, 1976, pp.30-33; for a summary, see David M. Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975*, Geneva, WCC, 1976, pp.18f.

[34] Ioan Sauca singles out these as the new developments which need to be addressed in the rearticulation of commitment to mission and evangelism. See "Towards a Fresh Affirmation of the Ecumenical Commitment to Mission in Unity", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 86, 1997, pp.383-88.

[35] "Acts of Commitment", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 86, 1997, p.13.

[36] The phrase comes from the address of former WCC general secretary Phillip Potter to the 1974 Synod of Bishops convoked in Rome to deal with evangelization; Potter's address is reprinted in Gerald Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds, *Mission Trends No. 2: Evangelization*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975, pp.162-75.

[37] See the fine exposition of this theme by Thomas F. Best, "'Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope!' An Approach to the Theme of the Eighth Assembly of the WCC", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 48, 1996, pp.401-13. See also Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Geneva, WCC, 1997; Musimbi Kanyoro, "A Life of Endless Struggle or Stubborn Hope: An African Feminist Perspective on Jubilee", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 49, 1997, pp.476-82; and Sebastian Bakare, "An African Perspective on the Jubilee Celebration", *ibid.*, pp.470-75.

[38] This is clear from the immediate context. Luke's opening chapters revolve around the question of the identity of Jesus. This is evident not only in the larger context of the announcement and birth stories and the testimony of John the Baptist, but also in the immediate context of the Nazareth story. Immediately preceding it is the genealogy, concluding with "son of Adam, son of God", then the temptation account, which turns on Jesus' mission in relation to his identity ("since you are the son of God..."). After the Nazareth event, Luke relates the stories of the unclean spirit who declares, "I know who you are..." (4:34) and demons who shout, "You are the Son of God" (4:41). Clearly this is a literary "framing" technique, in which Jesus' arch-adversaries, who know, serve to frame the story in which "his own" do not know what to make of him. In this masterly narrative technique, Luke makes John's point that Jesus came to his own, and his own did not know him (John 1:11).

[39] Peter Hocken, "Ecumenical Dialogue: The Importance of Dialogue with Evangelicals and Pentecostals", *One in Christ*, Vol. 30, 1994, p.107.

[40] René Padilla, "Wholistic Mission: Evangelical and Ecumenical", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 81, 1992, pp.381f.

Turning from God to God

Jaci Maraschin

Since joining the faculty of the Methodist University of São Paulo in the 1970s, I have learned to be a minister on a university campus as an Anglican in a Methodist milieu. The students, of course, are in the majority neither Anglicans nor Methodists. Their religious allegiances range from none at all to a great variety of churches, denominations and spiritualist cults. For the most part, students prefer soccer and sex with the hope of having, in the future, a job and a decent salary to survive in the economic jungle of my country.

This diversity among my students is a mirror of the country as a whole. Brazil is a huge place, with millions of inhabitants of many races, colours, customs and social conditions. The history and present reality of the country has been marked by these differences and contrasts. Its riches are unjustly distributed. In recent years there has been a growing popular movement in favour of agrarian reform. The neo-liberal government has been slow in facing the issue, and the president seems to be under pressure from the big landowners throughout the country. Farm workers, tired of waiting for a just policy of land distribution, have organized themselves in what is known as the "landless movement". Encouraged by segments of the Roman Catholic Church and of some Protestant churches as well, they now have the valuable sympathy of large groups of society. A recent declaration of Pope John Paul II on the subject was received here with enthusiasm and hope.

Land is not the only problem we face. If the Brazilian government has been successful in the fight against inflation, the cost of this success has been increased unemployment, poverty and social unrest. Corruption and criminality hover over our institutions and threaten the welfare of the country. Programmes of social health and public education do not work. We are still facing the ghost of illiteracy. And the rich continue to become richer and the poor poorer.

Who is God and what is God like?

What is the role of religion in such a disturbing situation? Turning Paul Tillich's insight upside down, I would say that religion is *not* the substance of our culture, and culture is *not* the form of our religion. Let us begin from the assumption that religion expresses itself through symbols and signs. In Brazil, symbols and signs, seductive though they may be, work much more on the surface of life than in its depth. To use an

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expression of Baudrillard, it is much more like a "superficial abyss" than the depth spoken of by the mystics.

In this "superficial abyss" God is also superficial and peripheral. He (this God is always a masculine being) acts as a king in the skies trying to protect the faithful and showing satisfaction when we do good works. He is "Brazilian", as many would believe and say in this country: that is, God is still able to look after us even if things are not so good all the time. In this way Brazil is an extensively religious country. There are churches and shrines all over the place. In an upside-down contextualization, we have succeeded in creating God after our image. Our Brazilian God reigns over the people in the great festivals of Candomblé in Bahia, mixing his powerful wits with the Catholic processions and Pentecostal frenzies. And he explodes in rhythm and many fantasies during Carnival. He is, of course, an image. Our creature. A caricature. A simulacrum.

Our God also serves the political power. In our Houses of Deputies and in the Congress he is present in the form of a crucifix. He is there, laying upon the cross, dying or already dead. This is good for the politicians. They know that images do not criticize. They are mute and blind. The politicians claim to be at his service. They talk about morality and reason. Since they belong to the age of Enlightenment, their God is moral and rational, a God of "principles". He is just like they are. Their image. Our Constitution, like many others in the Western world, speaks "in the name of God". This is, of course, the God of the "superficial abyss".

This peripheral God is the patron of electricity and is responsible for the electronic revolution. Our frenetic media come from his hands (or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that they come from his luminous rays). The well-known futurist artist Filippo Marinetti imagined a theatre very similar to what came to be MTV, able "to wrap the audience in a thunderous sensorium, 'a theatre of amazement, record breaking, and body-madness', erotic and nihilist, whose hero would be 'the *type* of the eccentric American, the impression that he gives of exciting grotesquerie, of frightening dynamic, his crude jokes, his enormous brutalities'."[1] The electronic revolution has given us the new world of communication, which is the basis for globalization. Our peripheral God reigns through television stations and sends his message through many "angels" and "saints" which are the powerful networks of the First World, full of promises and futilities.

The chief attribute of this God is *speed*. The ancient liturgical petition, *"O God, make speed to save us"*, is contemporary and post-modern. Speed certainly allows no time for meditation and concentration. The worldwide web of communication works under the blessing of our God of speed. Electronic media have many of the old divine qualities: they are omnipresent, acting everywhere, omniscient, knowing everything and telling what has to be told all the time, infallible, making no mistakes, omnipotent, all-powerful, all-embracing. The God of speed is the God of the Internet. The miracle of transubstantiation happens every day when we log on and network all around the world, becoming ourselves the God we wish to worship.

This brave new world of ours is also homogeneous. If you go around your TV channels looking for something new you will be frustrated, for they all tell you the same story. The news comes from the same source, which is also the source of all power in the capitalist world. No reporter wants to spend his or her time with a

story other than the one everybody is listening to or watching. The old search for fraternity (koinonia?) becomes the search for the same. This is why the powers of the world of fashion seek to dictate that all people dress alike, while trying to convince you that you are the only one to wear what everybody else is already wearing.

To which God shall we turn?

It is in this kind of world and against the background of these images of God that the World Council of Churches will assemble at the end of 1998, calling Christians from different churches and countries to "turn to God" and "rejoice in hope!" Biblical studies, liturgies, addresses, communications, posters, letters, articles and books are appearing on the theme in order to prepare the participants for this timely ecumenical gathering. This is also a jubilee year because the WCC is celebrating 50 years of existence devoted to the unity of all Christians.

Why this call to "turn to God"? Is it possible that the WCC has the feeling that the work it has done over these 50 years has not been done in the name of God? Has the Council been following paths which should now be changed? Have the churches not been walking in God's way and pleasing God with their efforts "towards a fuller koinonia"? Or has the ecumenical team working in Geneva suddenly discovered that the God of the World Council of Churches was "too small"? Is it possible that we have been mistaken all the time, worshipping a different God from the one revealed in Jesus Christ? Could the revelation possibly be partial or impaired?

Another possibility is to read the theme as an appeal to the world outside the World Council of Churches. In this case, it should be understood to mean: "Turn to the God of the World Council of Churches, and rejoice in hope!" It must be said that this is not probable. After 50 years of prayer and service it would be extremely naive and extremely pretentious to issue such a call. People working for the World Council of Churches know quite well the dangers of pride and heresy and are used to confessing their sins almost daily. The message of the next WCC assembly is clearly directed to everyone in Geneva and elsewhere: *urbi et orbi*.

Let us start again from the other end. I said before that "our God" has been only an image, a simulacrum, forged by neo-liberal culture and by the political interests related to the cause of globalization. One of his attributes is *speed*. He is the God of the media. For most of our churches he acts like an engine. He has to make ecclesiastical business grow and multiply. He is the God of prosperity, resembling a banker. Jesus of Nazareth is like his clone.

Since religious language, today as throughout church history, stresses the mythological side of representation and wants to have God nearby, within reach of our human hands. Friends sometimes ask me if I have had a "personal encounter" with Jesus. What can this question mean: "Have you had a personal encounter with Jesus?" Jesus, the clone of God, could certainly be made present through my imagination and sit down with me at the breakfast table for a comfortable and loving chat. As much as I would love to have God so near and so much like myself, my religious experience is completely other. God is a non-God. He is much more like *nothing* because there is nothing in this world that could be like him.

I wonder if the call of the WCC assembly theme could be better understood as an appeal for openness to mystery. Perhaps the answer is encountered most clearly in the mystical theology of the Pseudo-Dionysus, Eckhart, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Derrida. For example, Eckhart refused the old concept of "light" to speak about God and even dismissed the effort of attributing being to God. For him, God was "pure nothing". Instead of the "superficial abyss" mentioned above, God should be regarded as "pure abyss" and "night".

If we followed the mystical path, religion would be understood and lived as a completely different experience. It would mean that religion should move from the "certainties of faith" and the "rightness of doctrine" towards a more profound awareness of the darkness surrounding all things in our lives. It was not without reason that St John of the Cross preached about the "dark night of the soul" as the proper place for Christian life – something very similar to Kierkegaard's leap of faith in the darkness. The possibility of groping in the dark means deciding to live without assurances. The question arises: if God is *nothing* and if we are unable to know him, if there is a lack of evidence in our traditions and histories, why insist on being religious and on going ahead talking about God?

I consider Heidegger a prophet of modern times. His thinking helps us to exorcise not only demons but also caricatures of God. The modern structures of everyday life are responsible for what Heidegger calls "the running away of the gods" and the "darkening of the world". We are unable to contemplate a luminous God. But we can make a luminous God for ourselves, though his splendour and glory will be neither divine nor eternal. The luminosity of this God would be a false luminosity – like the lights of our earthly cities. Because the light of this too-human God cannot be the true light coming to this world, Heidegger affirms correctly that there is a "darkening of the world".

In this obscure and opaque world people experience a deep disenchantment, revealed especially in the absence of community life. Together with the decline of community life in favour of globalization comes a loss of autonomy. Other people look like enemies. They keep their distance from me and build walls of separation all around. We have proved to be good architects of boxes for our own imprisonment. Society becomes autistic. I get inside my car and listen to music through my earphones. I do not share my music with others. At a dancing party or a disco, the loud rock music is rhythmically attractive, but the dancers do not touch one another. I feel self-sufficient, happy with myself alone.

Globalization and homogeneity lead the majority to forget the possibility of original thinking. Electronic media do not seem congenial to *creative* thought. Even when Heidegger speaks about the end of philosophy he still affirms the importance of thinking. Thinking is indeed the distinctive characteristic of human beings. It existed many centuries before there were any philosophers and will certainly remain after the burial of philosophy. Greek philosophers always linked thinking to some kind of leisure. The behaviour of a good thinker should be somewhat lazy: it is impossible to think, for example, on the floor of the stock exchange. Thinking develops in contemplation, silence and recollection.

Thinking does not like speed. This is why the rule for television is "the quicker the better". In the opaque and obscure world of modernity it is convenient not to think, but since we are by nature thinking beings, we tend to think only what has already

been thought. The "dumbing down" of our culture is intimately related to our compromise with a kind of ready-made thinking. If ideas are made beforehand, if we all know already what should be thought, then communication for all its speed does not really exist.

Why does the process of globalization need this opacity and darkening? Ironically, the name given to the philosophical movement responsible for the rise of modernity was "enlightenment". In its beginnings the "enlightenment" probably did represent a certain measure of newness and freshness vis-à-vis the obscurantism of the pre-scientific age. But political and military alliances with capital led the world into the shadows under which everything has come finally to be decided in the gloomy offices of the World Bank.

The God of the "superficial abyss" is also the God of censorship. For that reason the maintenance of globalization needs the tools of censorship. Censorship is one of the main factors supporting the opacity of the world. The process of globalization depends on promises soon forgotten because they are never fulfilled.

In November 1997, *Time* magazine devoted an issue to the situation of our planet in the final years of this century. Among the analyses was an account of what has happened to five pledges made by leaders of 178 nations at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. (1) In the area of biodiversity, it was said that the chief problems result from human action. In the last five years there has been an acceleration of the loss of species due to the invasion of eco-systems by humans. (2) Regarding climate, everyone in Rio was concerned with the warming of the earth due to the emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Nations have in general ignored the fact and the warming of the earth goes on. (3) In the field of deforestation the nations promised to take measures to protect the forests. Instead, the same nations continue annually to devastate forests covering an area the size of Nepal. (4) In the field of finances things are not better. Rich nations have dropped their assistance to poor nations. The official aid of the United States dropped 37 percent between 1992 and 1995. (5) The Rio conference recommended the exercise of active birth-control, but there has been concerted opposition from conservative groups and organizations to public measures in that direction.

Turning and hope

Perhaps we are now in a position to return to the question about the meaning of the WCC's assembly theme. "God" has been seen to be a very polysemous word. It has multiple meanings because it is a name given to our multiple – and partly self-serving – interpretations of reality. But when we find a kind of hole in this concept, like a tunnel without end, we feel drawn through it into something mysterious and ineffable. This is why we insist in speaking about the unspeakable, even if we have to say *nothing* about the one we could perhaps call "the Nothing". The lack of evidence is transformed in the very basic evidence for such an affirmation.

So let us listen again to the call of the World Council of Churches. It is saying to us: Turn from the pretentious names of God to the God unnameable. Forget the God of the market and of the stock market. Turn to the silent God in the depth of your experience and being. Be contemplative and thoughtful. Turn from the God of speed to the

God of ponderousness. Take time for leisure. Turn from the God of prosperity to the God of the poor and the humble. Turn from the God owned by churches and denominations to the God of the whole universe.

Is hope still possible? The reason for our hope is precisely the possibility of this turning.

NOTE

[1] Quoted from Mark C. Taylor, *Notes*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993, p.185.

Turning Means Returning

The Assembly Theme and the Churches' Solidarity with Women

Irja Askola

Four voices, four faces of women who have made the journey of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), come to my mind when I survey the contemporary church scene:

- "Enough is enough. The church has no meaning, no space in my life anymore."
- "My God is like a good mother to me – a source of nurture and encouragement – and my church is in my house, with my friends; it has nothing to do with a building or a structure."
- "Yes, it is an ongoing struggle, sometimes two steps forward and one step back, but I am not giving up. Sharing with sisters keeps me moving. I am not going to leave the church to men; the church is mine, too."
- "Feminist theology is a luxury for me. I do not care if God is called 'she' or 'he'. In my daily struggle for survival, it is enough for me that God exists."

These four voices illustrate the groupings which define the reality of women in their relation to the church. There are more and more women who find it difficult to continue to support their churches. Doctrines or practices, negative personal experiences with the clergy or lack of resonance with their own daily life cause them to leave the church – some with pain and hurt feelings, some as a natural and logical move in their own development. At the same time, one finds a growing number of new forms of women's spirituality and religious activities, independent of the established churches. The growth of feminist theology, spiritual poetry, women's networks and support groups is still ignored or considered a threat by most of the established churches, while being recognized by some individual church leaders as enriching, necessary, complementary. The Decade has encouraged women who are part of official church structures to become better organized and recognized; and in some coun-

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tries the changes in agenda and approach of women's committees have been remarkable.

However, the aims of the Decade are still unknown and alien to many churches and even to women's groups. In Europe this is especially true in the eastern parts of the continent. The very same issues and emotions which form the soil and inner motivation for feminists in Western Europe are present in Eastern Europe, but the vocabulary and cultural mind-set mean that the Decade seems not to meet the needs there.

All in all, despite progress and positive developments, the Decade has primarily supported women in their work with other women and confirmed the solidarity of women with their churches, rather than causing churches to be in solidarity with women.

Ecclesiology needs to be reconsidered

Analysis of the material which has come out of the Decade shows clearly that during the process there has been a shift from a justice approach (social ethics) to an ecclesiological approach. We have entered into the heart of theology, challenging the self-understanding of the church and dealing with its very nature. In women who reject the established churches, formally or in practice, one can often see a need for faith, not a lack of it. Out of women's pain and frustration grows the inner strength to listen to the divine in themselves, to exercise their own spirituality, to belong to a supportive and caring community, to promote social justice together with others. In these actions we recognize the longing for a church, not the contrary. In theological terms, one can say that the body of Christ is seriously broken if these phenomena, these expressions and reasons are ignored, silenced or even made the subject of accusations. These are not just women's concerns; they are concerns which have to do with the strength and well-being of the whole community, of the whole church.

This fact should draw the attention of theological leaders of the churches and induce them to reopen and reactivate discussion and study of ecclesiological and anthropological issues. After all, is it not an old tradition of the churches to intensify their study of controversial issues rather than ignore them? And one serious theological issue of our time, which is very much reflected in today's debates concerning the participation of women, is the very nature of the church.

It is also a tradition of the churches to give special attention to those who are suffering. The presence of different levels of pain, frustration and rejection of women in the churches – often overlooked – is one of the obvious findings of the Decade and points to a clear need for serious theological discussions on these matters. After the Decade we will no longer speak of women's issues only as a matter of justice, but rather in the context of the *self-understanding* of the church of today, which is an issue for the whole community.

And so we turn to God... by returning to the road where Jesus struggled. In our encounters with church leaders we remember the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28) as one of our fore-mothers. It was not easy for her either. How difficult it was for her to make her point heard, to be understood, to be taken seriously! Jesus had other priorities and good theological arguments. His loyalty to the tradition and to his own mandate gave him a natural right to silence her, to leave her alone in her pain, to wish he had never met her on his journey. But she does not leave him alone. All her emotions and all her intellect come face to face with his embarrassment and his doctrinal logic.

There is a dialogue, in which both of them learn something. Did she know before how strong she was, that she could be the equal in an argument of a man she did not even know and with whom she was not supposed to speak? Had he ever experienced a challenge from a woman? Had he known before how it feels to change one's own mind?

In our present struggle we turn to God, with this Canaanite woman in mind. God in Jesus encounters a woman like many of us, who shares her experience of harsh treatment on the "theological road". Somewhere hidden in our hearts lives the hope that what happened to Jesus might happen one day to our church leaders as well – and that hope is a foretaste of joy.

The obstacles to women's participation

Participation of women in the church has been one of the Decade's measuring-sticks. It goes without saying that women are visible and active in church life: faithful, supportive, patient. However, the incorporation of all the gifts of women at all levels of church life has failed. The face of a church suddenly becomes very male at the point where real power, major financial decisions and authoritative theological reflection are found. In some churches the reasons for this are strictly doctrinal: since they do not allow women to enter the ordained ministry or diaconate, there are consequences at many other levels of their life and decision-making. But there are also problems in those churches which accept women's ordination. In some cases ordination of women is simply not implemented; in many cases it is not welcomed. The unequal role of women is justified by the argument that "the change would not work in our culture". This raises a serious theological question: why does the church give a secular culture priority over its own teaching instead of offering a living witness in the world to its own values?

Another argument used in opposing or ignoring the need to provide women the possibility for full participation is psychological: "The change would hurt so many." Theology is thus eclipsed by the emotions of one group, whose feelings seem to deserve special protection – leading those who are hurt and humiliated by the absence of change to wonder why their feelings do not matter.

In some cases women express the obstacles in terms of their own attitudes: "there are more open doors than we are ready to enter." For some women this is a clear decision: "We do not want to be part of a patriarchal working culture from which we feel alienated. We would rather find our own ways to meet our spiritual needs. The distance is our own choice." For others a lack of confidence in their own skills and low self-esteem have resulted from a Christian education – which raises both psychological and theological questions: Is it not a threat to the body of Christ that not all of its members are encouraged to grow as human beings, to take up their full responsibilities and to contribute all they have?

And so we turn to God... by returning to a room full of prominent men, into which a woman enters (Mark 14:3-9). She did not quite fit into the setting, especially in view of what she was going to do. Even the closest friends of the guest of honour were irritated: they considered her to be irrational, or at best over-reacting. Maybe it was not the best moment; maybe the message could have been conveyed in a different way. But it came fully from her heart. Surprisingly, Jesus disassociated himself from the majority opinion in the room. He appreciated her instinct, her spontaneity, her way of seeing the truth despite her not being well-educated or having high status. She sees

Jesus as he is and acts accordingly – anointing a king. She knows without knowing. Her instinct is correct, but it comes too early!

In our present struggle we turn to God with this unnamed woman in mind. God in Jesus encounters a complicated situation, in which a woman's instinctive wisdom brings turbulence into the community of men. The true insight of a woman and what she does as a logical consequence of that insight conflict with the usual procedure. Jesus keeps the two groups together, acknowledging, welcoming the woman's presence and her gesture, but not rejecting the core group ("old boys' network"). Somewhere hidden in our hearts lives a hope – a foretaste of joy – that what happened to this woman and to Jesus' critical colleagues might happen in our church structures as well one day.

Women's experience as marginal

Observations during the Decade about staff regulations and working cultures within the churches confirm that the secular model is firmly entrenched: the working conditions seem to favour men. Women experience passive acceptance rather than active encouragement. A simple decision for equal participation of women does not bring any real change if the pastoral climate and organizational structure do not facilitate the professional development of women, recognize the realities of their life (for example, motherhood) and declare their full rights through symbols, actions and events. Language is often mentioned as one of the most powerful instruments excluding women – both the language of church law and the vocabulary of the liturgy. Women become accustomed to being invisible, not being mentioned. It is somehow built into the culture that the superior role is given to one gender, not to one God.

In theological training, the number of female professors and positions for feminist theology has increased slowly. In most cases, however, feminist studies are considered as optional. Space is given to them but they are separate from the curriculum as a whole. They are there for those who are already interested and might otherwise complain. They are not seen as part of our understanding of the church and of the world. The need to rediscover the "hidden women" of church history and the "lost women in systematic theology" is obvious.

In pastoral and counselling training, women's own experiences are crucial. Reports from some churches confirm a total absence in counselling materials of women's realities (for example, domestic violence) and even give examples in which women's suffering is justified by citations from the Bible. The misuse of theology or clerical authority to protect those who abuse women needs serious examination in our churches and theological schools. Besides specialized feminist studies, women's realities, their gifts and their concerns in history and today have to be incorporated into the subject areas and methods of theological study as normal, natural and inclusive – rather than something new which must be tolerated.

And so we turn to God... by returning to the home of one man and two women (Luke 10:38-42). We are taken into the midst of hurt feelings, disappointments in each other's behaviour – in this case between two women. Martha, busy in the kitchen nurturing the spirit of hospitality, is angry. She is doing all the work, while her sister is getting all the attention, listening to the guest in the living room. Besides, according to the role assigned to women in this culture, her sister is behaving inappropriately. She is being provocative, doing something which is not good for a woman to do. Sitting at

the teacher's feet means learning and studying, which is meant for boys. Martha gets angrier and angrier. Mary must be told to behave! She should to come to the kitchen and help. But in her anger Martha does not find an ally in Jesus. Mary has her right to choose differently, to show her interest, to follow her own desire. The change has come, and the variety of roles is recognized.

In our present struggle we remember the argument of these two sisters. We invoke their memory when sisters of today start judging each other's choices, when bitter criticisms overshadow sisterly relations. We think of Mary, whose "new behaviour" was welcomed and whose capacity was recognized, when we meet women whose father, bishop, boss, partner or husband is diminishing and squeezing them through words or actions. We remember her courageous choice when we women are told that our wish is not acceptable in this or that culture. We think of her when we meet young women angry or in tears over being told by "elderly Marthas" how they should conduct their lives.

In our hearts the melody of rejoicing can already be heard, and we hope that what was once possible for Mary despite Martha's criticism will be repeated in our homes and churches: that the right to make a choice will become real and the blossoming of women possible.

Naming the sin of violence against women

During the Decade one discovery stands out above all others, found in similar ways on each continent and in every denomination: the wide incidence of violence against women, also in Christian homes and church environments. We hear and read of physical, mental and spiritual violence which take individual or structural forms. Trafficking in women, forced prostitution, incest, rape, sexual harassment, beating of wives or partners, brutal humiliation – all this is happening in the midst of our own communities. In Europe, the "new poverty" and increasing number of marginalized people in the West, together with a loss of socio-political rights in the East, are driving forces towards an ever more violent culture.

As striking as this phenomenon is the almost non-existent response of churches. This ignorance or silence seems to be linked with the difficulties churches often have in dealing with sexuality and anger. These areas, in which theological and psychological power are exercised, need to be put on the agenda of pastoral training in a way which does not ignore the point of view of women. Churches must create concrete and symbolic spaces for acknowledging and safely sharing experiences of violence against women. For example, these issues (not persons) could be named from the pulpit – in a sermon or in intercessory prayers. This brings awareness into the community and supports the victims in a discreet way, giving them recognition, the right to exist with all that has happened. Often in these cases practical and emotional isolation are an additional burden ("no one knows – and they shouldn't know, either").

The power of naming things is an old instrument of caring and of raising a prophetic voice against unjust practices. Some churches have developed special spiritual rituals to support survivors of sexual violence in their healing process. Violence is never simply an individual problem, but carries with it a sickness of the whole community. Besides giving wholehearted support to victims and survivors, churches should recognize this communal dimension of violence. They should more clearly support women in coming out of their concrete or psychological isolation: most of

them have not learned to speak up, they have learned to be ashamed. Finally, is it not now time that church leaders declare forthrightly and publicly that violence against women's bodies is a sin?

The findings and analysis of the Decade have shown that serious and continuing attention is needed to the issues of racism, xenophobia and the impact of colonialism. Women whose colour or faith differs from that of the dominant culture often experience double or triple discrimination, an experience of exclusion which is neither heard by their male partners from their original culture nor understood by women belonging to the dominant culture. If these women and their concerns are present at all in the churches, it is as a separate item on the diaconal agenda. They are not integrated into the life of the church as such. The inclusive community is still just a dream.

And so we turn to God... by returning to the Easter garden during the early morning hours (John 20:15). We see a sad woman, who cannot understand what has happened or why. Everything is too close. At this moment of despair, the encounter takes place. The risen Lord addresses his first words to a woman, in the form of a question. Space for listening. Space for a woman's answer. "Woman, why are you weeping?"

In our present struggle we return to God by returning to the Easter garden and the empty tomb. There we hear over and over again the question of the risen Lord. His compassion was interested in our tears. His sensitivity made him ask. Somewhere in our hearts we live in this hope. Maybe one day the powerful followers of Jesus will remember this question of his and create space for our many answers: why do you women weep? Women, why your tears?

The Decade ends, the challenges remain

While the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women will come to a close at the WCC's eighth assembly in Harare, the challenges it has posed will remain. The Decade process has given us a clearer map to these matters. We are able to see the problems in a more logical, relevant and systematic framework and to recognize their regional and global contexts. The theological seriousness of these matters is also better realized. The barriers and obstacles have been more clearly seen and named. The agenda is fixed, the decisions and their implementations are still open.

And so we turn to God... by returning to all of those images of God which we have met on this journey – to women who touched us with their pain, anger or hidden burdens; to women who supported and encouraged us, who showed us a way by their own way of life; to women whom we never acknowledge, but who exist everywhere and whose life story would be worth telling. And we return as well to men who have a meaning in our lives, in our own growth, to those who by their active love and in surprising encounters made us understand who we are and could be, as well to those who made us discover our pain and suffocated anger and to those to whom we were only "a disturbing element".

We cannot turn to God without returning to God's people. We do not own the kingdom, nor the road to it. We travel together as one body of Christ whether we like it or not. The home address of our hope is God's inclusiveness. After all, God has found ways to deal with all of us. Could we not do so as well?

Turn to the God of Mercy

New Perspectives on Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz

"Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" is the theme of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches. But why should our turning to God be a matter of hopeful rejoicing? Or, to put it differently, who is this God who could inspire us with hope and joy?

Most of the previous assemblies of the WCC answered this question by putting Jesus Christ at the centre. The second assembly (Evanston 1954) affirmed Jesus Christ as the "hope of the world"; the third (New Delhi, 1961) spoke of him as the "light of the world". The fifth assembly (Nairobi 1975) called on Jesus Christ as the one who "frees and unites" and the sixth (Vancouver 1983) rallied around the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the "life of the world". This emphasis on Jesus Christ had many advantages, for it enabled the churches to concentrate on the life and death and resurrection of the one who is, and must remain, the base and centre of the Christian faith.

Some have criticized this christological focus as "Christocentrism". They felt that a broader reference to the entire biblical material would provide important insights. To give but one example: the study of the Exodus-traditions in the Hebrew Bible enabled many theologians to develop a clearer picture of God's liberating and renewing presence. Traces of this approach can be seen in the fourth assembly (Uppsala 1968) with its emphasis on "Behold, I make all things new", as well as in the Nairobi assembly's insistence on Christ as the liberator. Others felt that "Christocentrism" could lead to a narrow emphasis on personal salvation and thus contribute to neglecting the fundamental dimensions of God as Creator and God as Spirit. In other words, the basic doctrinal decision of the early church – the trinitarian understanding of God – gained fresh importance. Thus it made sense for the seventh assembly (Canberra 1991) to gather around the prayer for God's Spirit to renew all creation.

These references to earlier assembly themes indicate the context in which the theme of Harare 1998 must be understood. The God who gives us reason for joyful

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hope is the one who has spoken to us in the Scriptures, who has turned to us in Jesus Christ, who dwells among us in the power of the Spirit.

And yet, the mere references to such dogmatic affirmations, central though they are, will not suffice. The forthcoming assembly provides us with the opportunity to discover well-known dimensions of the biblical message of God in new ways.

It is in this light that I want to look at the biblical God of mercy as the ground and reason for joyful and expectant hope.

Yahweh – the God of mercy and grace, endurance and love

Exodus 34 is central to the formation of the Jewish faith. It speaks in very solemn words about the self-revelation of Israel's God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The "name" of this God is a paradoxical formula, a "no-name": YHWH. Accordingly, the Jewish faith has always been acutely conscious of the fact that its God is un-nameable. And yet, this undefinable God draws near to Moses and reveals Godself as a God compassionate and gracious, long-suffering, ever constant and true (cf. Exodus 34:6). This definition of God's essential qualities is of central relevance to the "theology" of Israel. Hence it is not surprising that it became something of a formula, appearing in many places of the Hebrew Bible. In a very pronounced manner the reform of Nehemiah referred back to this formula (Neh. 9:17). It is also quoted in the Psalms (e. g. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8) and in prophetic texts (see esp. Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). In other texts only the first two adjectives appear.

According to this self-definition, God's very being is determined by *rechem*, which is mercy, lovingkindness, compassion; by *chen* which signifies grace, gracefulness, beauty; by *ered apaim* which stands for patience, endurance and steadfastness; and by *rab chesed we emet* which describes unending love, fidelity, honesty and truth.

A special word must be said about the term *rechem*. Originally it describes the "womb", the place of ultimate safety, sustenance and nurture for the unborn child. By carrying this remarkable identification of womb and lovingkindness into its "God-talk", Jewish theology introduces a definitely female or motherly notion into its understanding of YHWH. The mercy of God is "womb-like". God is like a mother who carries her unborn child, sharing her very life with it, making space within herself for the new being, nurturing new life with her own blood.

This "feminist" perspective adds depth to a perception of God that otherwise sounds very familiar, for Christian teaching and preaching refer constantly to God's love, goodness, fidelity and endurance. Consequently, God is assumed to forgive our sins and to heal what is broken. My impression is that we tend to understand this fundamental theological formula of the Hebrew Bible in a narrowly personalized, even sentimental manner. The easy assumption that God is merciful and patient, loving and full of grace leads to a rather cheap notion of reconciliation, as if it were something automatic. It is useful therefore to take a fresh look at the structural and even cosmic dimensions of God's mercy and lovingkindness. In this context I wish to suggest that this self-definition of YHWH needs to inform our understanding of God as Creator and Lord of history. Our theology of creation, our understanding of history and our concepts of humankind's role within all of life must be placed within this basic theological formula.

In this article I can only offer a few suggestions.

The teschuba

In the rabbinic teaching it was said: "Before God made the creation he created the *teschuba*. This term, related to the verb *shub*, means the capacity of change. The rabbinic saying contains a profound insight. It affirms the principle of openness and changeability in everything that is. There is no room for fatalism. Nothing is doomed to run its disastrous course. An element of contingency marks God's creation; every situation carries with it the possibility of change, of renewal, of improvement.

Since the *teschuba* is an in-built quality of God's creation, there is always hope. No situation can ever become so desperate that it would be outside the possibilities of the *teschuba*. This is in itself an expression of God's caring, patient and sustaining mercy. It is this pervasive lovingkindness that keeps history going, because it is at the heart of all the indefatigable hope and resilient imagination with which all life is constantly seeking new forms to express itself.

All life needs space

The self-definition of YHWH in Exodus 34 and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is not simply an observation about God's "nature", but also about what this God does. (There is no other way for us to "know" anything about God than by what God shares with us.) I referred earlier to the womb-like quality of God's care; it is this kind of divine "carrying capacity" that sustains all of creation from one moment to the next.

Since God's mercy is womb-like, we get a sense of the subtle equilibrium between intimacy and distance, connectedness and space that governs all forms of life. Both the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 and the creation Psalms (esp. Pss 103 and 104) make it clear that each created thing requires its specific space to fulfil its role. In very poetic ways Psalm 104 gives us a description of the different spaces which God's creatures need in order to fulfil what the creator destined them to do.

The natural sciences offer us clear evidences of the delicate balances which govern the interdependence of all life – and of the shocking consequences when these balances are disturbed. While we cannot understand all the myriad ways in which the various forms of life depend on and sustain one another, it is clear that these intricate interdependencies can function only as long as each component enjoys its particular space – the specific time, locale and environment that each organism needs to fulfil its life-cycle and to replenish itself. Human beings have tended to look first and foremost at the usefulness of particular parts of the created order and have thus overlooked the ways in which each part of creation requires time-space of its own in order to remain useful for others.

The sabbatical ordinances

A striking aspect of the Jewish faith is that it sees the sequence of time in particular rhythms. One of YHWH's central commandments has to do with the observance of the sabbath, the day of rest after six days of labour. Its holiness is not considered a peculiar cultic requirement for the Jewish believer; the sabbath is a holy day of rest for the entire household, including the animals. In this way the merciful and gracious God of Israel establishes a unique and specific rhythm of time which is seen to be indispensable for the well-being of human beings and their associates in the animal world.

This rhythm is further applied to the sequence of years. After six years of labour the seventh year is proclaimed a sabbatical year of rest, again not just for the faithful,

but for the entire society, including the animals and the fields. Such an understanding of the rhythms of time goes far beyond cultic regulations to reveal something like an anthropological and even ecological principle which guides the functioning integrity of all life and safeguards its restorative and regenerative qualities.

The third level to which Israel carried this concept of time-rhythms is the jubilee, the year following seven times seven sabbatical sequences.[1] This "super-sabbath" has an additional socio-political quality because it is designed to restore the functioning of the basic productive units of Israel, the families, by way of a complete forgiveness of debts and a re-establishment of just and equitable relationships within society. The basic idea of the jubilee seems to be that each human being should be able in his or her lifetime to experience this complete liberation from bondage – whether to poverty or riches.

The time-rhythms in these sabbatical ordinances introduce an element of interruption into the flow of time that helps to control the development of disparities and tensions within the social fabric. They reflect the fascinating concept that the flow of time must be regularly intercepted or it will accelerate beyond proportions. The weekly sabbath serves to maintain the wholesome meaning of work and thus stands in the way of unlimited "progress" and exploitation. The sabbatical years introduce the dimension of regular intervals at the social and ecological levels in order to help control the exploitative tendencies of human activity. Finally, the jubilee submits the intergenerational accumulative potential of human endeavour – and failure! – to radical interruptions. This peculiar stewardship of time by way of its regular interruption has a wholesome and constructive purpose: to re-create the space each social unit requires in order to fulfil its function. When such "time-management" is not observed, societies end up with systemic distortions that tend to lead to chaotic eruptions and violent conflicts.

In sum, the biblical message of the womb-like mercy and compassion of God leads to fundamental principles that govern the well-being and *shalom* of the created order. This mercy must never be identified with the altruistic generosity of pious people; rather, it must be regarded as the basic paradigm which provides the sustaining space for all that is and thus also informs our concepts of justice and peace.

It is of vital importance, therefore, that the theological formula in Exodus 34 is followed by the words: "... maintaining constancy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin, and not sweeping the guilty clean away..." (34:7). I would suggest, not least in the light of the jubilee ordinances, that forgiving is about restoring the necessary space damaged by violent intrusions of various sorts. "Forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin" is not about sheepishly condoning violence, but speaks of re-establishing the functioning integrity of natural and social units.

Jesus – God's mercy in person

It is revealing – in the truest sense of the word – that Jesus began his ministry by referring back to the jubilee tradition of his people Israel (Luke 4:16-21). In his own life and witness he wants his followers to discover the "year of God's favour": the time of liberation for the poor, release for the prisoners (most of them incarcerated for being unable to pay their debts), health for the sick and freedom for the victimized. Jesus came to restore and heal the space that each person needs in order to come into his or her own. I wish to exemplify this by referring briefly to two sentences in Mat-

thew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, one from the Lord's Prayer, the other from the Beatitudes.

"Forgive us our trespasses..."

Whether the Greek *opheilémata* in this petition of the Lord's prayer must be translated "debts" or "trespasses" is a matter of constant debate. Whereas "debt" connotes the more material and factual aspects of what someone owes to the other, "trespasses" suggests the aspects of process and relations. The latter thus seems to me to communicate more accurately what the Lord's Prayer speaks about. All of life is characterized by continuous interaction, by passing and movement. The more intimate and direct these interactions, the greater the risk of violating the sphere of the other. Our looks can be respectful of the other person's dignity, they can also be intruding. Words even more so: they can make somebody laugh, they can make somebody cry. Bodily movements are riskier still. An embrace can heal, an embrace can kill. Sexual intercourse is the most dangerous of all. It can be the source of highest bliss or a means of utter devastation.

Since being alive means relating, moving, going and coming, it inevitably consists also of getting too close, of intruding and trespassing. The term "trespassing" is superbly meaningful because it describes this phenomenon that occurs all the time wherever human beings live, namely the violation of the other's genuine space. For in order to communicate, all living creatures need their own space. Intimacy and distance, connectedness and separateness condition each other. The functioning integrity of all creation depends on how the space of each creature is acknowledged and respected. That explains why we yearn for a place of our own, for some space between the neighbour and us. That also explains why we become restless when this space is denied in such daily occurrences as traffic jams or overcrowded elevators. More importantly, wherever human beings – and other forms of life – are subjected to systemic situations of encroachment, harassment and trespassing, as in densely populated slums, they will begin to fight for space or to destroy themselves. Aggressive and self-destructive forms of violence are the inevitable consequence of denial of space, of trespassing.

Much of European Christianity is marked by a severe privatization of the biblical message. So, too, the "trespassing" or "debts" in this petition of Jesus' prayer have become an item of privatized spirituality. Thus we need to remind ourselves of the full impact of Jesus' asking his followers to pray for the coming of the kingdom, for daily bread, for forgiveness of all our trespassing, for liberation from temptation. All this has social, political, even cosmic connotations.

Since trespassing happens in all forms of interaction, from the most intimate relationships to the most complex economic ones, work for the healing of these damaged relationships is as necessary as our daily bread. And that is what forgiving is all about. It is the daily work of giving back what has been unduly taken, of restoring what is broken, of rebuilding what has been torn to pieces.

There is today a growing concern about the spread of violence in all parts and sectors of our societies. I suggest that this is the consequence of systemic forms of space denial. The so-called "debt crisis" is one of its most pervasive and global expressions. Although nations are affected by this in different ways, some common impacts can be observed. In many countries, especially of the two-thirds world, the debts have reached such astronomical proportions that they have a crippling effect on the eco-

nomic and social life of their peoples. The readjustment plans imposed by the international monetary institutions have a strangulating effect; in other words, they take away the space that any nation requires to rebuild itself and provide for the needs of the coming generations. The debt crisis can thus be understood as an alarming example of how processes of trespassing and victimization have reached global proportions and threaten to put the earth into chaos.

As Christians around the globe pray the Lord's prayer, they are called to work for policies which provide people with the necessary space to breathe new life, to unite their forces in elaborating schemes by which debts can be forgiven. Forgiveness is a vital component of social healing, of rebuilding relationships and creating trustworthy and sustainable structures. In his prayer Jesus places this healing exercise within our relationship to God, whom he teaches us to call Father. He calls us to ask God to forgive us all our trespassing, in other words, constantly to renew and rebuild the space all of creation needs for its life and well-being. So Jesus reminds us of the enduring mercy and unfailing grace with which God is sustaining the universe.

"Blessed are the gentle..."

The Aramaic word *l'makikhe* (cf. Matt. 5:5) connotes more than gentleness and meekness. It also means humility and sympathy with nature. The promise that people with such "soft" attitudes should "inherit the earth" seems paradoxical. It goes against the grain of the pervasive ideology of the "tough guy" which dominates today's economic and political settings. "The winner takes all" is the motto by which success is measured, implying that those who are stronger and more ruthless than others deserve it all and subtly blaming failure on the defeated and thus excusing the heinous victimization that is needed in order to "stay on top" (for "the top" is always the tip of a mountain of victims.)

The global impact of this winner-syndrome can be exemplified by the staggering fact that by mid-1997 some 258 people controlled as much wealth as 45 percent of the entire world population. By claiming enormous spaces for themselves, these 258 persons are destroying the life-sustaining space of billions of human beings and of uncountable forms of life. The winner-syndrome accentuates the dramatic destructiveness of the prevailing paradigm of domination. The "tough guys" who despise gentleness, humility and meekness in their effort to control the riches of the earth turn out to be the ones who destroy them.

What Jesus teaches us, however, is the humility that derives its energies from the "humus", that is the "earth". It is the strength that springs from a sensitive awareness of the intricate needs of all life and therefore attempts to respect and honour the space of each living thing. It is the strength that can grieve with all those who are deprived of their right to a fair chance in life. It is the strength that seeks to imagine ways of inhabiting this earth together with all the myriad life-forms. This is the humility or earth-bound spirituality that is blessed with the promise to inherit the riches of the earth. It is the spirituality which reflects the womb-like care with which God sustains all life.

Ecumenical communities as schools of mercy

These reflections on the biblical God as the God of mercy and compassion, sketchy though they are, are meant to substantiate the call of the Harare assembly.

Turning to this God is ample reason for joyful hope indeed. Surrounded as we are all over the world with the massive realities of violence and abuse, famine and starvation, exorbitant affluence and exorbitant misery, it is timely to be reminded of this other reality which also exists in this world, even more so, which lies at the heart of it and keeps it going in spite of everything. The ecumenical community of churches assembled in Harare is called to affirm that because our God is merciful, compassionate, gracious and loving, all of creation is founded in mercy, compassion, grace and love. These are the fundamental forces that carry us along, together with every form of life.

Learning from the mystic traditions

"We have been loved from before the beginning." This sentence of the 14th-century English mystic Julian of Norwich summarizes succinctly why Christian people have every reason to rejoice in hope.

In the drudgery of our daily lives we often lose sight of this basic truth. It takes the eyes of awe – the childlike sense of wonder – to see through all the layers of darkness and to discover this "amazing grace" as our ultimate reality. This is what the mystics have always known. They experienced that faith is closely linked to awe, awareness and receptivity. It seems to me that the ecumenical movement ought to learn more from these traditions, for they can help us to deepen our sense of being grounded in God's grace.

The North American theologian Matthew Fox has said that prophets are mystics in action. What he is pointing to is the close relationship between prophetic witness and mystic receptivity, between outward activity and inward stillness, between social and political advocacy and spiritual openness, a life given to sanctification based on the awareness of the intrinsic holiness of life. It follows, then, that our affirmation of the God of mercy expresses itself in ministries of caring and healing.

In the "school of mercy"

The second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997 accepted this approach by adopting the term "school of mercy" from St Isaac the Syrian. This 7th-century saint was convinced that the Spirit of the merciful God would wait to create within each Christian "a compassionate heart..., a heart which is consumed for the sake of the whole creation, for human beings, birds, animals, demons and for every creature" (*Basic Text*, para. A23).

The Graz assembly elaborated this approach by saying that such schools of mercy can and must be established not only in the home and the family, but also within the churches as they work for greater unity and between communities of faith in their attempt to overcome age-old layers of mistrust and prejudice for the sake of "lasting systems of alliance" (A26). Graz was also very clear in saying that our faith in the merciful God compels us to critique economic systems that protect and favour the rich and discriminate against the poor, that foment the growing violence within and between nations and aggravate the devastations of the earth's resources.

In this article I have tried to show that what is traditionally called "reconciliation" and "forgiveness" can well be understood in terms of providing space for human beings, for societies and, not least, for the households of life on this planet. Providing space has different aspects, of course. For those who claim too much space it means

giving up large parts of it so that those who have been deprived of their space can come into their own. Forgiving and giving up are the two sides of genuine processes of reconciliation. And because they are painful and costly they are very rare. For me the dimension of giving up covers what is often called "restitution" or "compensation".[2]

"Providing space" is a perspective that applies not only to interpersonal relationships but also to social, political and ecological situations as well. I have already referred to the debt crisis as one of the most acute dimensions in which policies of "providing space" are of vital necessity. As the earth becomes more and more crowded, the peoples of this earth need to learn how much space each may rightfully claim. This is a basic ethical axiom that needs to be applied to matters of population control, to policies of hegemonic domination, to excessive depletion of vital resources.

The earlier references to the sabbatical ordinances can serve as an invitation to develop a comprehensive stewardship of time. The world is finite, and yet it has become the home of uncountable forms of life, exactly because each part was enjoying its specific time-space. We are slowly becoming aware that the spreading mercilessness of global economic activity, mirrored by various forms of massive violence in the media, and the emulation of the "winner" with the consequent victimization of the "loser" are destroying the complex time-rhythms needed to sustain life. The paradigm of domination which still guides most of politics, science and commerce is based on the assumption of immortality. But ours is not a "world without end". Contemporary cosmology confirms what ancient religious wisdom has always known, that this is a world with a beginning and, therefore, with an end, and that conscious human beings must submit all their actions and omissions to the recognition that they are finite.

Although it appears paradoxical, it is this awareness of our finiteness that is the precondition of life in its fullness. That is why the humble are the ones who can inherit (inhabit) the earth. The understanding and management of time is thus of paramount ethical significance if humanity is to have a meaningful life in the coming millennium.

"In the Name of the Merciful"

The notion of mercy, finally, links us with other religious traditions. Each chapter of the Quran begins with the invocation "Allah, the All-Merciful". This is one of the clearest examples of the close relationship that lies at the heart of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths. The Graz assembly pointed out that the affirmation of the merciful and compassionate God is the most profound article of faith that connects the three Abrahamitic religions. "On this Jews, Christians and Muslims agree. Herein we recognize how deeply we are related, and that this relationship, after having been obscured by a long and bitter history of persecution and religious wars, could be the basis for common action" (A6).

The WCC's eighth assembly meets in Africa, where Christians and Muslims are often in competitive situations. It will be an important factor – and not only for the future of Africa – whether both religions can learn to agree, first, on what they owe to their Jewish "mother-religion", and second, on what it means to enter into "schools of mercy" together and thus together to contribute to the healing of nations.

NOTES

[1] Cf. H. Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge – Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Geneva, WCC, 1997.

[2] As I have argued in my book *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation*, Geneva, WCC, 1997, the term "restitution" suggests that the status quo ante can be re-established. This tends to overlook the process-character of human activity. Rather, processes of giving up and forgiving ought to aim at facilitating a better situation in the future. The emphasis cannot be on "repairing the past", but on "preparing for the future".

Taking Responsibility for Ourselves

The Assembly Theme and the Church's Diaconal Task

Barry Rogerson

Baptism and the wilderness tradition

At the entrance to the Chapel at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva there is a copy of a 12th century Greek mosaic depicting the baptism of Christ, a gift of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras. It is unlikely that those who articulated the Harare assembly theme, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" saw this mosaic as their inspiration. Nevertheless, the pictorial representation of John baptizing Jesus in the river Jordan provides a focus for the essence of our theme.

John the baptizer comes from the wilderness and baptizes in the river Jordan. The setting is the boundary between the settled land of the people of God and the wilderness, between the known and the unknown and between the past and the future. Mark describes the event in these words:

> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.[1]

John the baptizer stands firmly in the prophetic tradition. The proclamation he makes is God's and not his own. John's proclamation is to be understood against a background of the wilderness tradition.[2]

This wilderness tradition is to be found in Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but it finds its most clear articulation in Hosea.[3] Hosea speaks of the promised land, which Israel now inhabits, as the mother of Israel whose true Lord is YHWH. To reach this promised land Israel had journeyed through the wilderness from Egypt, the land of her slavery. However the motherland has been disgraced by the worship of the Baals and God's judgment would be to withhold the blessing that maintains the land's fertility. A note of judgment is heard in the threat that unless Israel renounces the worship of Baals then the people will be expelled from the land of promise. Nevertheless Hosea sounds another note, a note that speaks of the renewal of hope. In *returning* to the wil-

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derness the old relationship of love and trust in God is restored and again YHWH will speak "tenderly" to God's people.

So Mark's phrase *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*, which is seen by many to be riddled with difficulties, may be interpreted in the light of the prophetic use of the Hebrew verb *shûb* – to return.

- God promises to those so baptized, who spiritually return to the wilderness, that God will re-establish a relationship of trust and love. So begins a new history of grace, grace that enables the people of God to obey the Torah, to walk in the Way, or as some of the rabbis described it, to "be tied to the chariot of God".
- During Israel's original journey through the wilderness the people of God had expected God to act decisively. God's decisive act was to bring Israel to the promised land. Those receiving John's baptism are once again to expect God to act decisively. John the baptizer clearly points to the mission of Jesus as that decisive act when he says, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."[4]

The Marcan account of the ministry of John the baptizer has very positive echoes of the Harare theme of *Re*turn to God – Rejoice in Hope. For John the baptizer, Jesus of Nazareth was God's decisive act and we are ourselves are baptized into him.[5] In Christian baptism we are made one with Christ, we are empowered to be his disciples, disciples who walk in the Way. While baptism is received only once, the promises and gifts that God gives in baptism are renewed repeatedly in worship and especially in the celebration of the eucharist. Worship plays a vital part in our understanding of the Harare theme and we will return to that theme again.

John the baptizer, and the prophets who preceded him, expected to see God act as God had acted in the wilderness in bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land. The God of Israel was a God whose actions were characterized by faithfulness, patiently calling his people anew. So God acts decisively again in raising Jesus from the dead, a Jesus of whom it was promised that he would "go before" the new Israel.[6] We who are "in Christ" look expectantly to see God act decisively in our own time. Stephen Bayne, once Executive Officer of the Anglican Communion, summed up this insight when he wrote,

> The mission is God's, not ours. He is the one who is at work out there.... We go out to encounter our blessed Lord creating and sustaining and loving and forgiving and inspiring and dying and being born again among the people of the world who do not know his name... And to us, less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that we are privileged to go where he is and for a moment to stand by his side.[7]

The jubilee

At first sight the biblical concept of jubilee sits uneasily with the theme "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope". Roland de Vaux states quite bluntly that the year of jubilee "was a utopian law and it remained a dead letter".[8] A second glance however uncovers a number of important insights.

Leviticus 25 is concerned first with the "sabbath year". The "sabbatical principle" pervades Israel's self-understanding and the rituals and festivals that underline and recreate Israel's covenant relationship with God. Israel's life as a community is shot through with the number seven. The sabbath is a day of rest on which no work is done,

while in the sabbath year no crops were harvested, thus witnessing that in Israel all the blessings and joys came from YHWH, whose covenant relationship with Israel was marked by generous love.

In the sabbath year slaves are set free and debts are remitted. Both of these ordinances are to be found elsewhere in the Pentateuch in Exodus[9] and in Deuteronomy.[10] A limit is set to the length of time a Hebrew slave may be owned and for how long an Israelite may owe a debt before it is remitted. In both cases the figure is seven years. The sabbath year sought to restore the covenant relationships to their original state. In Israel there was to be a levelling of the economic and hierarchical structure of the community. The sabbath year stressed the unity of Israel but also the absolute sovereignty of YHWH.

The year of jubilee is described in the rest of Leviticus 25. This year also seeks to restore the covenant relationship to its original state. The novel feature of the year of jubilee was the restitution of property. Most commentators agree that it is unlikely that these provisions were ever carried out, but the presence of this chapter in Holy Scripture witnesses to an ideal of justice and equality that reflect both the relationship of YHWH with Israel and the demands God made upon it.

There is a retro-leptic element in the concerns of the sabbath year and the year of jubilee. The aim is to ensure that there is a restoration of the covenant relationships to its original state. If the idea of jubilee is to inform and renew the work and witness of the churches then it must have not a retro-leptic element but a *pro*-leptic focus, a focus which reflects

- the unbroken connection between worship and social action: Walter Brueggemann in his recent *Theology of the Old Testament* strengthens the connection, if in somewhat abstract language, between worship and social action when he says, "... it is evident in the contemporary world, as in the ancient world, that a regularized, stylized practice of symbolization is indispensable for the sustenance of intentional ethical practice";[11]
- that the remission of debt and the freeing of slaves reflect the justice of God, but also the creation of unity, koinonia, within the community. What was limited to the covenant community of Israel is expanded in the Christian tradition to include the whole creation. It is God's purpose to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:10). This theme has informed and inspired the development of a Common Understanding and Vision for the World Council of Churches;
- that the mission is God's and not ours. The church needs the charism of discernment to catch the moment, the kairos, and so to act with God.

Israel's tradition of the sabbath witnessed to the requirement, placed upon the people of God, to set people free, free from debt and free from slavery. And while it may be true that the tradition of jubilee was never implemented, such a tradition witnesses to the requirement to redistribute resources by sharing according to people's needs. These demands find their own expression in the life of the church as the church seeks to be faithful to its calling to be an effective sign of the coming reign of God. This is true in particular in the exercise of diakonia, a theme to which we now turn.

Diakonia

In the context of the World Council of Churches, diakonia is understood as responsible service in the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in

response to the needs of people".[12] The term derives from the Greek verb *diakonein*, which is taken to mean "to serve." A related form is *diakonos*, which allegedly means a servant (male or female). On this basis, Christians throughout the world seek to serve those in need, work carried out effectively by WCC over the years, most recently through Unit IV, Sharing and Service.

In 1990 John N. Collins published *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*,[13] a revisionist look at our common understanding that diakonia *is* service. Collins has made us look again at how the members of the young churches, for example those founded by Paul in Achaia and Asia Minor, understood the "*diakon*" word family. *Dia-konos* means etymologically "through the dust", but after careful analysis of the use of the *diakon* family of words in non-biblical Greek Collins has made it clear that the *diakonos* was "the go-between", "the messenger" or "the agent" and not the inferior servant, as has been our common understanding.

Collins argues that what was true of extra-biblical Greek makes perfectly good sense when we come to the New Testament. When Paul speaks about himself and Apollos as servants (*diakonoi*) he conveys the understanding that both he and Apollos belong to a God who has entrusted them with a message, one which they have a duty to pass on and which has a right to be heard and believed.[14] It is not our concern now to discuss the meaning attached to the *diakon* family of words in relation to Paul's discussions about his apostleship, nor in relation to the meaning of "ministry" and who exercises it. However what the New Testament does give us is a glimpse of something which will be developed later on: people called "deacons". The underlying meaning is: here is someone who is the "go-between" or the "agent", someone who is given a commission or a task to undertake; those called "deacons" are the agents of those who exercise "oversight". Even so it is not clear what the content of that task or commission is.[15]

As the mission of the church develops the deacon's task becomes clearly associated with the care of those in need. But the deacons did not meet the need themselves. It was the deacon's task to bring to the notice of the congregation those in need of prayer and care and to organize the resources, both of money and of people, which were necessary to provide that care. From this three insights can be drawn:

- The care of people in need is carried out by the congregation as part of their discipleship; it is a responsibility given at baptism. There are clear echoes here of the content of the covenant relationship to which the wilderness tradition witnesses.
- The people of God carry out the care and prayer themselves. They do not leave it to a representative figure, the deacon, to carry it out for them.
- There is a clear connection between worship and the creative caring for those in need. This is an echo of the insights that have emerged from the ecumenical exploration of the jubilee theme.[16]

Further insights from the late mediaeval and Reformation ages will broaden and deepen our understanding of the baptismal responsibilities of *all* the members of the church. At the dawning of the European Reformation, in the 16th century, the exercise of charity had two objectives. The first was the giving of alms and the creation of charitable foundations, and both were ways in which the giver sought salvation. Secondly, charity helped the poor by supporting them in their poverty. This situation was ripe for questioning by a bold and insightful Reformer.

The rise of pauperism through urbanization, changed economic practices, war and plague had outstripped the theological and practical resources of the church at this

time. If we are tempted to judge the late mediaeval period harshly, then note this gentle reminder that mediaeval canon law said

> poverty is not a kind of crime. In case of doubt it is better to do too much than do nothing at all.[17]

Martin Luther was the Reformer who undercut the mediaeval religious ideology of poverty by the doctrine of justification by grace alone. Luther wrote,

> The *significance* or effect of this sacrament [that is, *the mass*] is fellowship of all the saints... Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city...[18]

Luther makes a direct connection between the celebration of the mass and social ethics. The "right use" of the sacrament builds up community so that those in need may come and seek support; and "as love and support are given you [meaning the recipients of the sacrament], you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones".[19] The late mediaeval church had broken the connection between worship and welfare but Luther, along with other Reformers, taught that the congregation was responsible for supporting those of the community who were in need, a support that required ordered structures.

A practical example of Luther's teaching is to be found in Wittenberg. There, in Reformation Germany in 1522, Luther helped the city leaders create an early example of organized social welfare. The following is to be found among the seventeen articles of legislation governing this programme:

> A common chest was established for poor relief, low interest loans were provided for workers and artisans, and education and training for children of the poor were subsidized.... Begging, including that of monks and mendicants, was abolished. Artisans and craftsmen unable to repay loans would be excused from repayment for God's sake. Daughters of the poor would be provided with appropriate dowries and given in marriage.[20]

In what must have been a community that had no structural unemployment the aim of the city leaders was to enable people to help themselves; only if that were not possible is charity to be given, and then generously and not grudgingly.

Two insights can be drawn from Luther's teaching and its practical application:

- There is a clear connection between worship and welfare. This is an insight that stands firmly in the tradition of the first four centuries of the church's history and is echoed in the Harare theme.
- Creative care is best given in a form that enables people to help themselves. Part of being fully human is our ability both to receive and give, and to make a contribution to the life of the community in which we live.

The collection

With these Reformation insights in mind we can return to the account of Paul's "collection" for those in need in Jerusalem.[21] In various references to "the collection" in the New Testament the diakonia words refer not to "aid", as many modern translations insist, but rather to the "mission", perhaps even the "embassy" which was to carry the gift to the Christians in Jerusalem. Clearly the account of this collection has continued to inspire the care, concern and generosity showed by one local church to

another. It is simply understood that such generosity, and the responsibility of one community for another, are part of the Christian calling, and from this two insights can be drawn out:

- There is an emphasis on the giving of the gift rather than on the gift itself.
- The giving of the gift develops and maintains koinonia between local churches.

The giving of gifts between one local church and another builds up the koinonia between them. The giving of gifts is an effective sign of the coming reign of God. The giving of gifts is best exercised when the gift is designed to help people to help themselves. This building up of individuals and communities witnesses to the full humanity that is God's will for the creation. The norm, if building up koinonia matters, is that gifts should go from one local church to another. Such gifts enable the local church receiving the gift to develop its witness and service, and help it to grow in maturity and accountability, while those who gathered the "collection" learn the truths involved in the letting-go of the "gift". The World Council of Churches may need to reflect on how it exercises this renewed understanding of diakonia.

An African speech

At the opening of the plenary commission on Faith and Order held at Moshi, Tanzania, in August 1996, Tanzanian President Benjamin William Mkapa addressed the commissioners. The following extracts from that speech emphasize the insights we have drawn out from the Harare theme and from a renewed understanding of diakonia.

- To us unity is a national virtue... We recognize fully that this exemplary unity did not come of its own... We have vowed not to take the present unity for granted, but to continue nurturing and promoting it in our multi-faith society. And here I do not mean simply co-existence, but the nurturing of a social union that cuts across all faiths.
- We need to encourage cooperation in social welfare issues and projects. The churches in Tanzania have a long and laudable history of investing in social welfare projects.
- We recognize that quite a large proportion of social sector investments made by local churches originate from outside, including from the churches some of you represent...
- One of the problems that acts as a millstone around the neck of Africa is the unbearable debt burden.
- There is a perception that all Africa wants is aid. Africa needs genuine and all-round friendship, partnership and cooperation with Europe and other developed countries. We need each other.
- In conclusion, let me affirm that the African countries know all too well that the task of developing their economies is their own.[22]

In this speech there are echoes of the insights we have drawn from the Harare theme and from a renewed understanding of diakonia. The local churches in Tanzania are the agents, the "deacons" of social welfare. Some of their resources have come from local churches throughout the world. These gifts have built up the effectiveness of the church in Tanzania and enabled a proper care of those in need to be exercised. The president affirmed that Africa does not want charity, aid, but the kind of investment that helps them to help themselves. On this basis an equal and just partnership can develop with the rest of the world.

As member churches of the World Council of Churches we must encourage each other to look carefully at the need to redistribute our resources according to need. This redistribution of resources needs to be implemented in such a way that every member church is allowed and encouraged to take responsibility for solving its own problems. Obviously the burden of international debt overshadows and limits all that the churches can achieve. "Jubilee 2000" is of vital importance. As a movement it incorporates many insights that have emerged from the Harare theme and from a renewed understanding of diakonia. The remitting of the debts of the poorest countries in Africa would allow people to have a new beginning, to draw a line under the past. Such an action has echoes in the keeping of the sabbath year and the year of jubilee. Jubilee 2000 would give nations and peoples the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves, to act in accord with this vital insight drawn from Luther's involvement in social welfare. It is the simplicity of what is being proposed and the scope of its effects that take the breath away.

NOTES

[1] Mark 1:4.
[2] See Ulrich W. Mauser *Christ in the Wilderness*, London, SCM Press, 1963, chaps II and V.
[3] Hosea 2:1ff.
[4] Mark 1:7.
[5] While the baptism of John is not seen as a prototype of Christian baptism the themes of covenant, of a journey (typologically the Exodus) and the eschatological expectation of the coming of the reign of God are common to both.
[6] Mark 16:7.
[7] *Now Is the Accepted Time – Writings and Prayers of Stephen Bayne*. Cincinnati, Ohio, Forward Movement, 1983, p.80.
[8] Roland de Vaux *Ancient Israel*, London, 1961, p.177.
[9] Ex. 21:1-11.
[10] Deut. 15:1-11.
[11] Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1997, p.678.
[12] Teresa J. White, "Diakonia", in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC, 1991, p.275.
[13] Oxford, Oxford UP, 1990.
[14] 1 Cor. 3:5.
[15] Phil. 1:1.
[16] *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva, WCC, 1982, Ministry, para. 31 and commentary, p.27. The section on *Deacons* states, "... deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the church's life", para. 31, p.27.
[17] Carter Lindberg, "Through a Glass Darkly: A History of the Church's Vision of the Poor and Poverty," *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 33, 1981, p.51; citations from Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1959, p.133.
[18] "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ", in *Luther's Works*, Philadelphia and St Louis, 1955, vol. 35, pp.133.
[19] *Luther's Works*, *op. cit.*, vol. 35, pp.50-53.
[20] See "Liturgy after the Liturgy: Welfare in the Early Reformation", by Carter Lindberg, in *Through the Eye of a Needle: Judeo-Christian Roots of Social Welfare*, Emily Albu Hanawalt and Carter Lindberg, eds, Kirksville, Missouri, 1994, p.187.
[21] 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8 and 9.
[22] Tanzanian president's address to Faith and Order commission, *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 4, 1996, pp.520ff.

Turning to God with a Whole Heart

Nestor O. Míguez

In a meeting of some leaders of an aboriginal nation in northern Argentina with some missionaries during the 1992 commemoration of the fifth centenary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus, the conversation turned to the consequences of 500 years of Western culture and religion for the original peoples of the continent. One aboriginal leader, the pastor of an evangelical church, at a given moment, said calmly: "It was difficult for us to believe in the God you preached and the Bible you brought to us since you and your own people do not believe in it." He paused, and everyone looked at him with questioning faces. Then he continued: "The Bible says that every 50 years the land should be given back to the families of the original owners. Ten times 50 years have passed, and not even once has this law of God been fulfilled. We did not hear preachers proclaiming it. We had to learn to believe in God not *through* your witness, but *against* your testimony, through your words but against your fulfilment of those words."

In other words, this pastor was telling the missionaries to evangelize the Western world, to turn themselves to the same God they preached to others.

Turn to God out of sorrow

Osvaldo Catena was a Roman Catholic priest who dedicated his life to living and working among the people of the slum areas of Santa Fe, Argentina. He was a gifted musician and wrote many of the songs that have renewed Latin American liturgy. During the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), he was harassed and threatened, despite his age and heart condition; and one of his best friends and co-workers, the lay base community leader Waldino Suarez, was imprisoned and tortured. Catena finally had to take refuge in a monastery, where he died before the end of the military regime. Among his songs, he wrote:

> Everything is telling you: Turn to God!
> Everything is calling you, with a whole heart!
> There is a voice in everything: Turn to God!
> for those who want to hear it with a whole heart!

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(*Refrain*)

Turn to God, with a whole heart!
Everything is telling you, Turn to God!

Many are starving (Turn to God!)
many are suffering (with a whole heart!)
There is injustice and war (Turn to God!)
There is oppression and hate (with a whole heart!)
Christ is still dying (Turn to God!)
His blood is still running (with a whole heart!)
There is a voice in everything: Turn to God!
for those who want to hear it with a whole heart!

In the midst of the grief and sorrow he shared with the poor people of the slums of Santa Fe, Osvaldo Catena could still proclaim this call: Turn to God with a whole heart! Like the prophet Jeremiah, from whom these words are taken (cf. Jer. 24:7), Catena could see only violence and injustice, persecution and hate. He realized that the blood of the crucified Christ is still running in the suffering of street children, abused women, unemployed men. For the many people who are marginalized and discriminated against, strength and hope for salvation could come only from hearts turned to the God of justice, freedom and love. Those are big words, which evoke vigorous ethical and ideological debates, but for the poor people with whom Catena worked, they translate into very simple things: something to eat, shelter, adequate clothing. Perhaps a little bit more: the right to have a job and wages that would allow parents to experience the dignity of raising their family through their own work, the right to feel that they are not despised because of the colour of their skin or their accent.

Turn to God with a whole heart! – a word that rings in the minds of all who survive each day at the edge of starvation or despair, reminding them of their God-given human dignity, assuring them that even though they seem excluded from the concerns and plans of the powerful of this world, they are not excluded from the love of the God who promises them that the reign of God is theirs.

"Turn to God" is an appeal to life. Turn away from the blood-thirsty idols of death, which can live only from the sacrifice of the weak and subject creation to the bonds of their own vanity. For those who live in sorrow, "Turn to God" is a constant reminder that we should not yield to the illusion of the irresistibility of the powers that have already decided who are winners and who are losers, that have determined the lot of those who have the right to easy and pleasant lives and of those who must always suffer in poverty or distress. It is a call to join in the struggle for life, to overcome the "each one for himself or herself" philosophy of individualistic consumerism. It is an appeal to do away with the sense of futility that threatens the small achievements of love in everyday life. "Turn to God" speaks of the possibility of building community beyond the growing violence of the poor against each other, beyond the tearing of the fabric of society, the immodest exhibitions of wealth and power that accompany globalization, the corruption that goes unpunished, the drug market which continues to grow.

The prophets tell us again and again that "Turn to God" is not only a word of hope for those in distress but also a word of warning and exhortation for those whose greed

and arrogance have blinded them to the fact that they are still accountable to their Creator. It is a word of judgment for those who have developed hearts of stone where God cannot abide. It comes as an invitation to repent and to rebuild a sense of solidarity, to recover their human nature – because in the end those who do not heed the cry of their needy neighbour and deny the dignity of any fellow human being also deny their own humanity. The prophet warns that it is useless to turn to God with bloody hands, for God will turn away – no matter how large and solemn the offerings and feasts, no matter how many and eloquent the prayers – if those who offer and pray have not served their weak neighbour (cf. Isa. 1:10-20). Sins are forgotten and God becomes friendly only when repentance takes place, when pride is replaced with humble faith and hands are washed through justice, solidarity and service to the "least of these who are members of my family" (Matt. 25:40).

"Turn to God with a whole heart!" is a reminder of another kind of power, the life-giving Spirit dwelling in every human being and inviting us to extend that same life to others. The Spirit blowing in all creation is the same voice calling us to discover God's presence as the one who sustains and preserves and impels the search for abundant life. The Spirit allows us to turn away from slavery to become children of God. To turn to God is to turn to the Spirit who helps us in our weakness, who cries and groans within us and the whole of creation, eager to see the redemption of our bodies and to be freed from the bondage of decay (Rom. 8:16-27). To turn to God is not to turn away from this world or from the bodies that bear the marks of exploitation and torture; rather, it is to trust that God is able to turn the world God created into a place of life and the bodies of those God loves into a life of joy.

Turn to God, the joy of life

When I worked as pastor with a team in a church-sponsored housing project for poor and abandoned single mothers, we sometimes visited middle- or upper-class congregations looking for support. More than once I heard the complaint: "But the poor do not know how to save for a better life. They will never come out of that condition no matter how much we help. Every time they have some money, the first thing they do is to organize a party!" In fact, of course, in today's economy saving is hardly a viable way for poor people to escape poverty. Technological advances, managerial ability and above all financial speculation are today's path to fortune – all of them obviously beyond the horizon for most of the world's population, certainly for poor people with little or no schooling and cultural limitations that expose them to exclusion and violence, marginalization and discrimination from an early age.

With growing unemployment in the whole world and with the very low wages paid to unskilled workers, those born in culturally and economically handicapped families have virtually no chance to improve their lot. In the minds of most of them, the only legal exit from the "misery village" is winning the lottery, or having a son who becomes boxing champion or a professional football player. A few still dream of becoming a successful popular musician or television star, but most realize that the entertainment world is run by corporate interests to which very few have access. Hence the frequent choice for the more risky options: prostitution, joining a gang of thieves, or working for a drug dealer. In my conversations with marginalized men and women, especially poor young people, this is what I hear again and again.

In the 1960s many still saw political mobilization as an option. Today among the people there is a generalized distrust in the results of this. In extreme situations there may be a sudden social upheaval, but this is far from any organized movement to change the fundamental structures of society. With rare exceptions – the landless peasant movement in Brazil and Paraguay, the struggles of some aboriginal nations, the activities of human rights and feminist organizations that have enlarged their scope into social action – the majority of people have abandoned any hope of a different future. Resignation has become an integral part of the cultural pattern for the lower classes and marginalized people.

In times past, among the poor in the cities and even more in rural areas, the family was the last refuge where human life was human. But today, not even family life is free from violence and anger. In the growing urban slums of third world cities, where people are crowded together, promiscuity and violence grow. No wonder that when people in such circumstances collect a little money they think not of saving but of having fun. Human life cannot endure perpetual and absolute sadness. So they seize any opportunity to experience something that tastes different from the sour tears of every day, something of the joyful dimension of life. Dancing, sports and street parties bring the chance to feast, breaking up the long days of agony, doing away, at least for a few hours, with that sense of meaninglessness which pervades daily life. The music and the cheering, the movement of the dance, the colours and lights create new emotions and excite feelings otherwise unknown. The Saturday night dance and the Sunday football match are the closest approximation to joy that many can experience in life.

To be sure, these are imperfect and inadequate substitutes for better times. Tensions, conflicts and violence also hide in these activities and often burst out unexpectedly, transforming feasting into mourning. But when the future counted in years seems to promise only more suffering, the future counted in the days to go until the next party or open-air popular music festival is the most immediate metaphor of hope.

Religion is also an alternative way. The need to have a space and time for rejoicing, for crying and shouting, for singing endlessly and expressing deep feelings in body movements and dance, is one of the factors accounting for the growth of Pentecostalism, charismatic movements and other forms of popular religion, including the revival of some traditional popular, Afro-American or aboriginal cults in Latin America. Certainly the search for identity in the midst of globalization and post-modern fragmentation is another fundamental reason for the growth of such movements. When the hard facts of reality blow away the possibility of all reasonable change, people call on the Spirit, or the spirits, to keep hope and meaning alive.

All this shows that, no matter how desperate people's daily lives might appear to be, the quest for a time of rejoicing is a constant one for human beings who do not want to resign themselves to life as it is. This search will show itself in unexpected ways and in forms which others may consider improper. We may criticize these ways and point to the ambiguity of those experiences. We may observe that feasting and sports are superficial and that hope and joy in Christ are quite different from a night of drinking with some friends or the expectation of a time of amusement signalled with firecrackers. All that is certainly true. But if we want people to understand this as a fact which affects daily life, we have somehow to relate both experiences. For the poor, as in many Old Testament texts and in the gospels, God's ultimate presence is seen as a time of feasting, banqueting and music.

Turn to God, rejoice in hope

God's presence in people's lives cannot be limited to extraordinary experiences, to social responsibility or even to consolation in times of grief. All these are part of what Christ gives us through faith, but to "rejoice in hope" points not only beyond these but also to something closer to daily life. If "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" is to be considered as something more than an abstract theological assertion, if it is to be part of our understanding of the mission of the church and an invitation to enjoy human life as a true gift, then we have to spell out in concrete ways what it can mean for each context and for our universal communion.

The proposals at the base of the jubilee laws, as well as Jesus' proclamation of "the acceptable year of the Lord", are related to the renewal of conditions that make daily life an anticipation of everlasting life in the resurrection. Human dignity recovered through land distribution and honest work; the forgiveness of debts which mortgage the life of future generations; liberation for those oppressed and discriminated against because of racial origin, sex or culture; consolation for those who mourn; special consideration for people with disabilities – all of these, and many other actions that can be specified according to each particular context, are part of the appeal to turn to God and rejoice in hope.

In this sense, the theme of the WCC assembly is not only a call to personal conversion, but also a claim to modify economic relationships, to re-create our cultural world, to establish new ways of doing politics. Only when we take into account the presence of God in the poor, the destitute and the excluded can we think of a real jubilee for humanity. The joy of life should not be reserved to exceptional instances or occasional parties. The presence of the Spirit in our lives should lead us to discover joy in the many manifestations of God's love in everything we do and experience. But in order to be able to share that experience of the Spirit in the communion of the church and with the whole of creation, the concrete life situations of the "least of the members of God's family" must offer some metaphors that allow the relation of the Transcendent to everyday life. Human ethics and our responsibility in nature are to be integrated as part of the same response to the vocation to be human in God.

As the aboriginal pastor cited at the beginning of this article reminded us, jubilee is not only a scriptural metaphor about God's forgiveness; it is a concrete fulfilment of actions destined to make human life and dignity available for all. "Turn to God!" is not only an exhortation Christians address to others, but a word that should echo in our own hearts in order to transform our own faith in acts of solidarity and justice – actions that might allow others, particularly the weak and despised, to rejoice in hope.

Discipleship in a Local Context

The Assembly Theme as Inspiration for Mission

Njongonkulu Ndungane

Our church, our country and our region all face new challenges that offer wonderful opportunities for mission and ministry. We stand in the twilight, just before the dawn of a new millennium. If you are an early riser, you will know that the lightening of the sky just before dawn breaks is a time of great expectation and anticipation. Our age is such a time of great expectation and anticipation! Therefore it can never be "business as usual"; it has to be business with a difference. We have to open our hearts to God, trusting as did Abraham, our forefather in the faith, without being able to verify that trust. It is a trust that God will lead his church by walking beside us and living in us, always to the honour and glory of his name. We therefore need to pray for grace to embrace one another as we journey with God into the future.

The challenge of poverty

Poverty can be defined in terms of financial income, in terms of the loss of human dignity and new human suffering. We can also speak of poverty in terms of denial of access to opportunities for advancement. It is said also that poverty is found in those whom progress has pushed to the periphery. That is particularly telling for us since we live in a country and a province in which there are huge material and natural resources at our disposal, as well as dramatic technological advancement; but also inequalities, and an uneven distribution of wealth resulting in the awful consequences of poverty, which we see in the faces of women, children, people with disabilities, the marginalized, the elderly, migrants and refugees.

Clearly, poverty is not just about low incomes. The deprivation it causes is far wider, bringing with it a retardation of knowledge. It also has its selfish side, preventing some human beings from sharing in the increasing wealth of technology and information that is available.

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We have just started the first year of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. It is pleasing that so many organizations are using their energies to do away with poverty. A coalition of organizations has signed a "Declaration of War on Poverty", while an ecumenical commission is also actively engaged in mobilizing the churches to act meaningfully and decisively in the struggle against poverty. The alliance arraigned against poverty includes the church, nongovernmental organizations, government, trade unions, the UN and, significantly, homeless peoples' organizations which represent grassroots communities here in the Western Cape. The establishment of such a coalition is good, as poverty is too great a problem to be left to a divided society. The Declaration describes poverty and the effects it has on the lives of people in these words:

> The war on poverty and inequality is South Africa's most important priority and our greatest challenge. Eradicating poverty is essential to consolidate the gains of our new democracy. It is a precondition for social justice, peace and security in our land.

South Africa and poverty

Poverty should have no right to exist in South Africa. Our constitution has created an environment – and a mechanism – for the provision of "full enjoyment of human rights". The Bill of Rights provides for traditional civil and political rights such as the right to equality, human dignity, freedom of association and of expression, as well as political rights. But it is unique in the world in its specific reference to the rights of access to housing, health care, food, water and social security, to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being, and to the right to basic education. These are *fundamental* rights that must never be viewed as secondary. They belong integrally to the human rights that must be seen as belonging to everyone, and as being protected by all.

Poverty in South Africa is inextricably linked to the legacy of apartheid. To spell out the inequality of resources and opportunities that apartheid has spawned, allow me to recall a photograph of a South African woman in a rural area walking underneath huge electricity pylons and power lines which are taking electrical power to the cities and industrial heartland of our country. Balanced on her head is a bucket of brackish water which she had walked several kilometres to fetch from a tiny pool in a dry river bed. Here progress and poverty are vividly juxtaposed. As a country we face the huge challenge of addressing the glaring imbalances epitomized by this image. It is simply unacceptable that in an advanced technological society which has found solutions to the most complex of problems, poverty should exist – destitution amidst plenty.

Acting together against poverty

Such images should not lead us to a sense of despair and hopelessness. This year's United Nations Human Development Report makes it quite clear that poverty is no longer inevitable. The world has the material and natural resources, the know-how and the people, to bring about a poverty-free world in less than a generation. This, the report says, is not "woolly idealism", but a practical and achievable goal. It points out that over the past three decades a dozen or more developing countries have shown that it is possible to eliminate poverty in its most severe forms. In Britain, Minister Claire Short has said that poverty can be eradicated by the year 2015, provided there is the political will to do so. Over a century and a half ago, the world marshalled its

resources and launched a successful campaign against slavery. In our own times, moral and righteous people all around the globe campaigned for the end of apartheid in South Africa – and were successful. A concerted effort from all sectors of society is required now to eradicate poverty.

Let me commend those parishes in this diocese which have immersed themselves in programmes to combat the poverty in their midst. Many have programmes aimed at human development, as well as those that seek to alleviate the immediate hardships that poverty-stricken people experience. It is the human *development* programmes – the ones that teach a person *how* to fish, rather than just *giving* them a fish – that will bear the most productive fruit. Poverty is a formidable foe – it requires a creative sharing of all our resources in order to overcome it.

In this respect, let me share a suggestion that has previously been made and which has impressive merit. It is the simple proposal that the people of a parish, or a group of parishes, or a region in the diocese – or why not the whole diocese? – adopt as their motto: "Give a meal a week so that everyone has a meal a day." That is, they would commit themselves to sacrificing one meal a week until the year of jubilee, the year 2000. They would take the money that they save – most families in this diocese could probably contribute anything between South African Rand 20 and 30 (US$4 and $6) for a basic meal – and donate it to a special diocesan fund dedicated to programmes aimed at eradicating poverty. Ideally these would be programmes that seek to deal with the problem of poverty by providing training for work, or even work itself. Once the minds of creative people were applied to such a proposition, we might see exciting results. The funds generated could be amazing – if each family gave an average of R25 ($5) a week over the period, starting this Advent Sunday, a parish with 250 families would contribute over one *million* South African rand by the turn of the century! Here is a real and tangible way in which we can all be a meaningful part of "Jubilee 2000".

Our diocesan financial experts would, I am sure, find additional ways to make these gifts become even more valuable. This would result in desperately-needed resources being freed for people and projects so that they could have a head start in a common quest to enable all people to realize their full potential. I have no doubt that commerce and industry, other denominations and religious faiths, NGOs and even the government could be persuaded to become part of such an initiative. All right-thinking people in this country desire economic growth, for they know that it will lead to fewer unemployed and to an improvement in the quality of life of our people. I cannot believe anyone who can afford such a small sacrifice would be unwilling to participate in such a venture.

I am therefore calling for a national programme of "A Fast for the Celebration" – the celebration of the next century, the celebration of the fulfilment of the new South Africa, the celebration of a future for our children and the generations to come. Such a fast would see resources used to their fullest extent, and shape a new environment in which the contorted lines of division between the "haves" and the "have-nots" will become blurred as *all* are able to achieve legitimate and law-abiding objectives for themselves and for their community.

Please remember that fasting is widely practised by Christians. Our Lord himself fasted, with dramatic results. In this secular age, fasting has even become popular amongst those striving to perform better – at work, or in their sport – and, of course, in

that all-consuming 20th-century pastime of losing weight. We would all benefit from such a fast – and more importantly, the poor would benefit the most!

Acting together for housing

One such benefit would be that of having housing. I am told that there are 183 specific bureaucratic actions that people have to take in order to obtain a house. The process should be shorter! The situation is even worse here in the Western Cape where, winter after winter, we see the pitiful sights of people's homes being flooded because they live in inadequate shelters. We must also speed up the delivery of other basic services. No one in this land should be without sanitized water, electricity, telephones, proper education, welfare services and health care. It is a blot on the conscience of this nation that we still hear of cases of old people and the sick, the physically and the mentally handicapped, the poor and the dispossessed, who find themselves discriminated against because they have no access to the most basic social services. For them, the Bill of Rights is just another piece of paper. We are called on, as the people of God, to use the instruments that we have been given as a result of our pursuit of democracy, to make sure that *all* our people can look forward to realizing their potential as fully as they can.

One way of doing this is to create a bank for the poor. This proposal, tackled at diocesan level, would hopefully cascade into the national financial resource pool. The church's support for the establishment of financial organizations to enable ordinary men and women to own their own homes can be traced back to the formation of mutual building societies. These arose as early as the late 18th century in Britain, and about a century later in South Africa. These societies enabled people to purchase their own homes on terms which were affordable, yet in ways which held them accountable. In recent years we have watched in this country the demise of mutual building societies and the ascendancy of banks, with their stringent lending criteria. The cry has been ever present: provide some means whereby "ordinary people" can own a piece of their birthright – some land. Various schemes have been launched but, by and large, government and the financial services industry have failed dismally to respond to this call. The result is that we have an intolerable number of persons without decent homes. Many could afford basic accommodation, but as they have no credit record banks generally decline their applications for home loans. Many such people are part of the "informal" sector – that vast mass who are engaged in work, yet deemed officially "unemployed", such as hawkers and street vendors. The banks still refuse their applications for loans. People are trapped, by a new socio-economic milieu, in a vicious circle in which interest rates are high, growth is slower than the authorities would want, and the markets are volatile.

I want to suggest that a creative answer to our massive housing problem is a system in which the mutual and trustworthy use of communal funds can be applied to solve this national crisis. A mutual bank for the poor has flourished in more recent times in other countries, an example being the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. It is a question of having the will to succeed. While we call for governments to have the political will to combat poverty, we in the church must have the ecclesiastical and spiritual will to act in a cooperative manner to ensure the well-being of our fellows. If financial institutions and governments cannot act in a concerted way to solve a problem such as the housing shortage, then the time may have arrived for the church –

whether denominationally or ecumenically – to act. An attempt to do this in the form of a housing foundation was made at the beginning of this decade by one of our sister denominations and this was, in fact, far advanced until the untimely death of its main proponent. Regrettably, no one else has had the vision or the will to continue his work. But the *church* is still called to have vision and will – and others must keep aflame the candle of hope that has been lit.

I believe the church should be launching a programme aimed at the creation of a mutual bank for the poor. Care should be taken to ensure that we do so within the framework of the law, but we can no longer wait for the slow wheels of state and business bureaucracy to turn while our people shiver in the cold and drown in floods. Should commerce and industry wish to assist in this process we would, of course, be more than delighted to welcome them as partners.

I have no doubt that if a programme such as this were successful, we would find workers and their families empowered and rejuvenated. We would see a major decline in the crime rate and a return to the high social and moral values that we espouse as a church. Education would flourish, and a new generation would be prepared to create a new era of progress and development.

Issues of crime and violence

This past year has seen growing concern about the high levels of crime and violence, and society is being challenged anew to find innovative ways of combatting this scourge. Security forces on horseback, police on the beat, and the conspicuous presence of police in vehicles are amongst the best ways of contending with crime and violence and dissuading people from carrying out wanton acts of murder, revenge, theft or other criminal acts.

It has also been my privilege to have been part of an initiative that has led to an Inter-Religious Commission on Crime and Violence in the Western Cape. The commission's objective is to determine the reasons for the unacceptable level of crime and violence in our midst, and to suggest ways of dealing with it. This Commission will soon be launched formally; my plea is that you give it all the support it needs, both at community and regional level, and keep it uppermost in your prayers.

For prayer is a powerful instrument.

Renewing and reordering our diocesan life

After considering these opportunities for us witnessing for Christ on the national stage, let us turn to the needs in our own diocese. The *restructuring* of the diocese has been a subject of keen debate this year. It is clear that we need a structure to service the *mission* of the church in this place. Since assuming office I have been engaged in an open, transparent and consultative process which arose from petitions coming from two regions. There is a resolution before synod which results from this consultative process, and I hope that the diocese will commit itself to this new structure for the sake of the mission of the church.

But in addition, *equipping all our clergy* is necessary if our diocese is to flourish in the future – a future that will pose very different challenges from those of the past.

The new democratic order in South Africa has brought with it new freedoms and opportunities and these have, in turn, created fresh challenges for the church. The new dispensation and the transparent way in which public policy is formulated means that

clergy must be equipped to deal with this new situation with a new set of issues. For example, ethical and moral issues which have come into the open require serious and responsible handling. To this end we need well-designed, interesting and creative continuing ministerial education programmes to equip clergy with skills in social analysis, the use of the Bible, biblical interpretation, a methodology for Christian ethics, pastoral counselling and mediation skills. Such training will equip clergy to provide teaching and guidance not only for people at parish level, but also for those engaged in commerce, industry and other spheres of public life.

We want to encourage clergy to attend such programmes by offering incentives such as certification and a provision of an additional three weeks annual study leave for stipendiary clergy. Such a programme would be carefully monitored, and the progress of participants measured. It would recognize the crucial role clergy play in church and world, and encourage – and help – us all to "be good stewards of our gifts". As servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, clergy have a great responsibility of nurturing and looking after God's flock. This means we must care for their wellbeing, together with that of their families, by providing adequate support of all kinds for their work. Let us never forget that our clergy are amongst the greatest gifts we have as a church.

Turn to God: Rejoice in Hope!

So we come to reflect on our calling in this age to be servants of God, to proclaim our Lord and Master and to publish his name abroad. As we rejoice in the great privilege of responding to God's call to fulfil his mission in a new age, we turn also to God for guidance and empowerment. Thus it is fitting to conclude with thoughts on the theme, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", which will also be that of the WCC's eighth assembly in Harare.

Receiving guidance and empowerment from God, we are bold to continue our pilgrimage in faith, knowing that there is a loving Father who will always care for us.

Eagles like to build their nests high on the sides of mountains. The inside of the nest is lined with soft down and feathers. When the eaglet has been hatched, an amazing process begins. At the right time the mother literally "stirs up" the nest. She does so by removing, piece by piece, the soft inner lining, leaving only a prickly nest of sticks and twigs. She makes it uncomfortable for her young as she prepares it for its reason for being. Presently she will take her young to the edge of the nest, to the edge of the mountain, and throw it into the void.

Awkward and gangling, falling through space, the eaglet cannot fly, but its instinct is to flap its wings. At the very last second, before it is dashed to pieces on the rocks beneath, the mother swoops down under its young and catches it on her mighty pinions. It carries the eaglet back to the ledge, and throws it off again – and again – until the eaglet learns to fly, taking responsibility for its own life.

The Scriptures tell us that God deals with us like an eagle that stirs up a nest. When God in his sovereign grace chose to make the path his only son would travel a difficult one, Christ had to walk the way of sorrow and obedience. But he was raised in triumph to be crowned the King of kings, and Lord of lords! And to lead us to ever new experiences in his name.

Therefore the future must embrace the essence of a life born in faith, and acted out in the joy of discipleship! This demands that we face the future with God, and that

we understand fully that his arms, like the wings of the swooping eagle caring for her young, are always there to protect and guide us.

Turn to God

A prerequisite for doing God's mission is to turn to God. Accepting God as God means that we submit completely to him as his church, his body on earth. We must come to him in penitence, in the assurance that he forgives us and accepts us as we are, promising us wholeness of life, as surely as does the eagle her young. And as the eaglet, learning to fly, soars into the distant, unknown future, so we should be reassured that we too can rise to new heights of missionary endeavour in the name of Jesus.

As Charles Wesley's great Easter hymn puts it:

> Soar we now where Christ hath led,
> Following our exalted Head:
> Made like Him, like Him we rise;
> Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies.

If this great experience is to be ours, then we also have to recognize a claim on our lives, and hear a call to us; to show repentance in our hope: "...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14) In this act of repentance let us remember that to have found God is not the end of our search, but only the beginning. Paradoxically, as we search for God, God also searches for us. St Augustine reminds us that "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him".

We too are called to "find our rest" in Jesus – to let him be in us. We are called to do small things, so that great consequences and beautiful futures can follow for all humankind – small things like giving up a meal a week so that we can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, tend the wounds of the ill and show care to the disabled. It is, of course, costly, like climbing a mountain can be "costly" in terms of tiring us. But the scenery and the views, the great vistas of the world that fall before us, always make it well worth while.

We come to God to find inspiration and strength. We come to worship to ensure that we can make the world a better place, being renewed through the blood of our Lord. The South African theologian Gabriel Setiloane puts it in this deeply spiritual way: "He is that Lamb of God whose blood cleanses not only us, not only the clan, not only the tribe, but all, all humankind!" It is this loving God who is the basis of our confidence in the midst of the challenges and opportunities that we have. It is in him that we have our foundation, for the prophet assures us, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15).

We are called to a personal relationship with our Lord. It is a call to a relationship that moves from the personal to the communal, to a life of compassion and service, witness and worship, so that the whole of society shows more Christ-like qualities. Thus comes resilience for our journey. The prophet speaks of this resilience (Isa. 40:31): "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." On our journey God lights the way, giving us strength and energy to continue even when the going gets tough.

Rejoice in hope!

We are called on to evangelize anew and to take the word of God, rejoicing in hope (cf. Rom. 12:12), as it unfolds afresh for us in our developing society. We have a responsibility to interpret God's word so that future generations will worship and honour him with the same faithfulness and commitment to humanity as the saints departed have done, so they will be imbued with the same sense of hope and faith. God's agenda is open-ended: we journey into an unknown future, but we "rejoice in hope" and trust that he is always with us. Our rejoicing must be in the great and age-old truth that we have been saved by Christ. We are under grace, we are sons and daughters of God and heirs of his kingdom. Our relationship with God must be such that when our spirit cries "Abba, Father!" we know that our spirit is linking up with our Creator. Our happiness is the fulfilment which comes from knowing that we are held in the arms of a loving and living God.

We are challenged to launch out into the deep, in perfect faith, as did Simon Peter and the apostles when they went fishing (John 21:1-3). Once they were on the lake and saw Christ, they became secure in the belief that the best was yet to be. A transformation occurred, and with great anticipation and hope they carried on.

In our land, we don't always share their anticipation and hope. Many still despair, and sometimes the odds we face so overwhelm us that we lose hope. Yet we dare not be hopeless, for Christ is our hope and the risen Jesus is our strength. We claim him as our God, through our baptism, as one Lord, who came that we, in unity, might be one people in this diocese.

The Commission on Faith and Order stated emphatically at its 1978 Bangalore meeting: "The Christian hope is a resistance movement against fatalism. Those who believe in God know the power of his love. It is this love that recreates persons and societies. In Christ you are a new creature. The old has gone away and the new has come."[1]

God first loved us. Now we must go out and love others, that they too might live. People of this diocese, pilgrims for the risen Christ, workers in the new order: let us go forth into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to live and work to his praise and glory.

NOTE

[1] *Bangalore 1978: Sharing in One Hope*, Geneva, WCC, 1979, p. 8.

Rediscovery, Reorientation, Celebration

The Assembly Theme as a Call to National Councils of Churches

Noel Anthony Davies

"National Councils of Churches must fully claim the place that is properly theirs. The future of communion depends to a large measure on them". These were the concluding words of Jean-Marie Tillard's address to the Third International Consultation for National Councils of Churches (NCCs), Hong Kong, 1993.[1] This is a reminder of the growth and development of NCCs during the years since 1948 and the key challenge they present to the one ecumenical movement during this jubilee year and into the new millennium.

At the time of the Edinburgh conference (1910) there were two NCCs worldwide. By 1948 there were 30, together with 22 cooperative agencies associated with the International Missionary Council (which was integrated within the WCC in 1961). In 1998 there are 53 NCCs that are associated councils of the WCC and about another 40 in "working relationship" with the WCC, as well as about 50 bodies affiliated or having a consultative relationship with the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. This growth in the number of national ecumenical bodies and the extensive network of worldwide ecumenical relationships which has developed during this "ecumenical century" raise with particular sharpness the need for reflection on the vision, understanding and role of NCCs within the one ecumenical movement. The theme for the WCC's jubilee assembly could provide a stimulus and focus for such reflection, with its focus on penitence and renewal, celebration and hope.

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Worldwide and local

NCCs remind us, firstly, that the theme must be celebrated and explored within a context which is local, national and worldwide. Indeed, the richness of the theme lies in the interweaving of these "communities of belonging". In Wales, the first assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam was itself a powerful impetus for setting up the Council of Churches for Wales in 1956. But the worldwide vision of churches intending "to stay together" was also rooted, through the seminal influence of a number of ecumenical pioneers in Wales, within the soil and traditions and culture and language of Wales. Ecumenism has to be both worldwide and local if it is to bear fruit within the life and witness of the churches. This finds a much more recent echo in David Gill's reflections on the Hong Kong consultation (1993): "NCCs know that ecumenism cannot stop and start at the national boundary. The WCC knows that global programmes mean nothing if they have no national roots."[2] This interweaving of local and worldwide must continue to be a challenge and an enrichment. It represents the heart of the vision of NCCs within the one ecumenical movement.

This vision must, of course, be given some practical reality. In 1995 the WCC central committee approved "Guidelines for the relationship between NCCs and the WCC" which sought to set out guidelines for a fuller partnership between the local/national and the worldwide. There is at present very little evidence that these guidelines have so far shaped relationships. The challenge remains, therefore, to discover ways in which there can be a true partnership and mutuality between the WCC (as one of the structured manifestations of the worldwide ecumenical movement) and regional and national ecumenism.

In his recent book *On Being the Church* Konrad Raiser recognizes that the national and regional levels have not been sufficiently linked with the processes of the WCC, and suggests that the WCC has a key role in fostering "the coherence of ecumenical work at all levels".[3] One of the key aspects of such an exploration must be an elaboration of the understanding of the category of "associated council" within the WCC. This must not involve merely attendance at WCC events, communication and support. It must involve a partnership which includes collaboration in fostering koinonia between churches at both national and worldwide levels, mutual accountability, resource sharing, full partnership in determining and pursuing programmatic thrusts and, perhaps, at a time of increasing financial pressures, imaginative ways of sharing staff resources. It must move from mere symbolism to real partnership. In this relationship, as in others, it is a time for "turning".

NCCs as instruments of unity

Many NCCs had the search for unity as one of their foundational aims. The invitation of the theme to "turn to God" recalls us to Christ, "the church's one foundation", and to a renewed commitment to unity in communion with the one God, the source, redeemer and renewer of lives and churches. A number of international consultations for NCCs have helped to shape their developing self-understanding. Tom Best identifies two ideas which became fundamental for NCCs following their 1971 international consultation, namely, that theological work towards unity was basic to NCCs and that NCCs are "instruments" which enable crucial ecclesiological developments among their member churches.[4] Certainly these thrusts were central to the Council of Churches for Wales in the first two decades of its life. The third assembly of the WCC

in New Delhi and the Montreal Faith and Order conference bore fruit in the British Faith and Order conference in Nottingham in 1964, which urged churches to seek to covenant together for union "in units such as nations". The negotiations towards a covenant for visible unity in Wales, which were initiated and coordinated by the Council of Churches for Wales, were the first response to this call. During the subsequent decade, this "theological work towards unity" and its "instrumental" role in fostering ecclesiological developments became a high priority for the Council. Indeed, one of the continuing contributions of the Council was to hold before the Welsh churches a vision of one church renewed in mission. Since 1990 and the setting up of new ecumenical instruments in the nations of Britain and Ireland there has been a recovery of this priority, not least with the encouragement of the Roman Catholic Church. The "Called to be One" programme within Churches Together in England – which invited the churches to reflect on their understanding of unity and to explore ways in which they could move forward towards unity together – was a notable example of this. But there is a continuing debate within the ecumenical movement about the nature of this "instrumental" role of NCCs in promoting visible unity between their own member churches.

The Hong Kong consultation moved away from the concept of "instruments" and took as its theme "NCCs as servants and advocates of unity". In his keynote address to the consultation, Jean-Marie Tillard maintained that this concept of servanthood goes to "the heart of the dynamic of unity" and by their "sharing in the work of the Spirit" NCCs take on a sacramental identity: "they are the fruit of the Spirit and not just associations founded on good will".[5]

Communion

Professor Tillard identified two aspects of this sacramental identity which merit further reflection within the ecumenical movement. The first is "doxological communion", which he describes as the way in which NCCs "make real – beyond the divisions in church and community – the unanimity of all the baptized in the proclamation of their faith in God, the foundation of unity".[6] This adds urgency to two essential challenges for NCCs, namely, the need to articulate their shared faith within their own context and in unity with the worldwide church, and the need to develop ecumenical partnerships and programmes in evangelism. Both these challenges point to the calling of an NCC to be a focus, within its own context, for theological dialogue in areas where fundamental differences remain both within and across boundaries of tradition and denomination. NCCs must become communities of trust within which open and honest dialogue leads to a deeper communion of faith. Without this painful – but loving – struggle there is always the danger of superficial relationships and collaboration which do not face the hard questions of true ecumenism. "Such loving dialogue enables genuine ecumenical encounter which erodes mistrust, prejudices and traditional hatreds and fear of any questioning of confessional identity."[7] "Rejoicing in hope" (which has within it echoes of "doxological communion") is born out of this struggle.

The second aspect of sacramental identity which Tillard identifies is "communion in the modesty of human aspirations". He claims that this is "a conviction which runs through the whole Christian tradition since the days of the apostles... Christ's followers have to live happily in this world but with a happiness which numbers among its

sources a sober, moderate, temperate, reverent and sometimes even ascetic use of the good things of creation."[8] This challenges councils of churches "to heed this vision... in its social attitudes" and to a conversion to "the model of the Beatitudes". This particular aspect of their "sacramental identity" calls NCCs to be shaped not only by the koinonia of their member churches but also by the needs, priorities and hopes of the communities in which they are placed. They must not only become inclusive of all within the life of their member churches, but must also become fellowships of inclusion for all, not least for the poor and marginalized within their local communities. A fellowship of churches which truly "turns to God" will, in this way, be driven to penitence and be called to "modesty".

An ecumenical shift

Recent ecumenical developments in Britain and Ireland illustrate some of the possibilities and problems for NCCs of moving from collaborative bureaucracies to instruments, or servants, of unity. The changes are the result of a search for ways in which "communion" can be more fully realized in the life and mission of the churches. They are marked by a shift from "ecumenism as an extra" to "ecumenism as a dimension of everything the churches do", and "from co-operation to commitment to each other". The key is no longer the nature, structure and funding of the ecumenical body itself (although these do pose hard questions for the member churches, especially in a context of diminishing membership and financial resources).

In this model, the NCC becomes (in Tillard's words) "a spiritual space" wherein the churches themselves "recognise in the other a word of God which challenges, disturbs, perturbs and in the end leads them to ask questions about themselves... becoming an instrument of the Holy Spirit to break down the self-sufficiency of the churches".[9] Their calling becomes that of "displaying the unity (of the churches) and preparing for (their) full communion". They are no longer ecumenical bureaucracies, with their own policies or decision-making structures and authority alongside or over against the churches. They become the "spaces" within which the churches themselves live out their partnership and grow into deeper unity.

This model presents a real opportunity for the churches to develop patterns of real partnership locally and nationally in all areas of their life and mission. Here joint decisions could be taken, resources – in funding and personnel – shared, churches could be enabled to speak with one voice on national and international issues, joint training for an increasingly collaborative ministry could be developed and the formation of all God's people could be ecumenically structured and resourced. Such actions could "display unity" and "prepare for communion". There are many examples of the new ecumenical instruments in Britain and Ireland meeting this challenge. Joint Christian education in Scotland, the "Called to be One" process in England, the "Wales: A Moral Society?" report in Wales, the "Unemployment and the Future of Work" report by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, and the partnerships within and between the four nations in preparation for the millennium are all examples of a committed shift to "ecumenism as a dimension of all that we do together".

But there are problems also. The need for joint ownership of decisions calls for an elaborate process of consultation, which can be slow and indecisive, and which appears to many to be an inadequate means of responding to urgent national and international issues. Some member churches miss the "radical edge" that a national coun-

cil of churches represented in the past, when their own churches were reactionary and conservative by comparison. Constitutional requirements with regard to joint use of funding and personnel can also cause frustration. There is a tension between what an ecumenical body can, and should, fund from within its own resources (which come, of course, from its member churches) and what can and should be funded jointly by the churches themselves. There is a continuing question, especially (but not exclusively) for an NCC in which the Roman Catholic Church is a full member, about the authority and identity of the NCC – which is derived from the member churches – and the authority and identity of the churches themselves. This question continues to be the key question if NCCs are to be "spiritual spaces" for "displaying the unity (of the churches) and preparing for (their) full communion".

In his elaboration of the WCC assembly theme, Tom Best suggests that it "should encourage the churches to move – to move closer together in faith, life and witness; to move together close to the suffering and need of the world; to move away from their own organizational and financial difficulties, fears and hesitations".[10] This movement is at the heart of the recent changes in Britain and Ireland. The theme, which calls churches and ecumenical instruments to penitence and transformation and challenges us to shape the future in hope, could be a channel for renewed ecumenical energy and vision within NCCs and their member churches. It could equip the churches "to draw the consequences of their own shared experience in this ecumenical century"[11] and to risk the next stage of their ecumenical journey.

Shaping the future

When the Council of Churches for Wales was established in 1956 one of Wales' ecumenical pioneers, Huw Wynne Griffith, spoke about the churches "looking together towards the one Lord and with their Lord towards the world". This call to "face the world" has been central to the ecumenical movement from the beginning and has been integral to the identity of NCCs. In Paul Abrecht's words, "a large part of the energy of the ecumenical movement has been directed to the search for a common Christian witness to the problems of modern society. For many... most of its attraction is in its creativity and vitality in facing social issues and in the challenge they have posed to churches."[12] Much of the recent thinking and joint action in this field in Wales and, indeed, worldwide can be traced back to the world conference on Church and Society in Geneva in 1966, which "sought to understand the revolutionary realities that shape the modern world".[13] A conference for the churches in Wales in 1970 was inspired to a considerable degree by the Geneva conference, and focussed on "Revolutionary Social Change" and "Revolutionary Change in Wales" (another example of rooting the worldwide vision within the soil of Wales). In the years since that event, ecumenical engagement in socio-political and economic issues in Wales and internationally has followed this same process of holding together the larger vision and the local context: the national focus is set within the context of worldwide changes and the need for justice. The struggle against apartheid and racism, the campaign against nuclear proliferation and engagement, the churches' shared witness within the industrial and economic life of Wales and the struggle for national identity and language in Wales are all examples of this process at work during recent decades.

This challenge remains. During the last four years the churches in Wales, through Cytun: Churches Together in Wales, have reflected together on questions of public

morality in contemporary Wales, questions such as education, health, housing, economics and governance. The report, *Wales: A Moral Society?*[14] is an ecumenical response to these issues which was initiated by a conversation with the government's secretary of state for Wales. The introduction describes the report as "holding up a mirror to give a picture of some aspects of social life in our nation... but it also seeks to highlight the vision shared by Christians of different backgrounds and allegiances, the beliefs that shape their response to and understanding of our life together".[15] And this is seen not just as an exercise in social responsibility, but as a contribution to the proclamation of the "good news": "an invitation to faith as the ground of social renewal, renewal in every area of personal and communal life and may thus be a proper contribution to the evangelistic task."[16] The recent decision by the government to establish a national assembly for Wales, which will take key policy decisions about the life of Wales, presents a powerful challenge to Cytun: Churches Together in Wales and its member churches to be partners in shaping policies and institutions which can contribute to the transformation and renewal of society.

There are many examples of NCCs being engaged in this way in the public life of their nations. Huibert van Beek in his presentation to the Hong Kong consultation noted two trends. He believed that churches in Europe and North America had become more cautious, a trend he attributed to the churches' declining impact on society. But in other areas of the world (he cites Africa, Asia and the Pacific as examples), van Beek believes that NCCs have affirmed and increased their social-political involvement.[17] There is a fundamental need here for NCCs in different world regions to share insights, experience and resources with each other.

This process of social engagement illustrates a central thrust of the assembly theme. The call to "turn to God" calls the churches – not least in a secularized and post-modern society – to re-examine the foundations of personal and public morality, to point to the possibility of renewal and transformation (for the God to whom we turn is a transforming God) and to shape the future "in hope". NCCs and their member churches will recognize here a theological framework for their engagement with their society. This engagement will have the jubilee at its heart. It will look "... beyond the present world order, drawing its inspiration from God's desire to restore persons, communities and the natural world to a state of coherence and prosperous harmony. By its commitment to social transformation it gives hope to the oppressed and to the land...".[18] Here is a contemporary challenge held out before the NCCs and their member churches to engage in Jesus' "jubilee critique" of "a society and system which had never dared to take the demands of God's jubilee seriously".[19]

Challenges for the future

Konrad Raiser has identified five key terms for a renewed ecumenical vision.[20] They are *wholeness* (life is enhanced when shared); *shalom* (healing broken relationships and communities); *reconciliation* (forgiveness breaking the spiral of violence); *sufficiency* (challenging continual growth and becoming stewards of our own resources); *catholicity* (ecumenism as communion). These elements of a renewed vision find echoes in the issues which have been explored in this reflection on NCCs. They could provide a framework for determining their priorities and could shape the ways in which the WCC, regional ecumenical organizations and NCCs could foster the much-needed "coherence" of the one ecumenical movement.

And in this process the assembly theme could offer inspiration. Calling NCCs and their member churches to "turn to God" challenges them to rediscover their basis within the one faith of the church and to be converted (through a reorientation and re-examination of priorities) within their own context and within the one ecumenical movement. Calling NCCs to "rejoice in hope" invites them to celebration and festival at a time which some perceive to be "an ecumenical winter", and, as churches together and within their own societies, to shape the future in hope.

NOTES

[1] Jean-Marie Tillard, "The Mission of Councils of Churches", *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, July 1993, p.271.
[2] David Gill, "Personal Reflections", *ibid.*, p.300.
[3] Konrad Raiser, *On Being the Church*, Geneva, WCC, 1997, p.100.
[4] Tom Best, "The Life and Meaning of NCCs", in *Instruments of Unity: NCCs within the One Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC, 1988, p.34.
[5] *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, July 1993, p.274.
[6] *Ibid.*, p.275.
[7] *Ibid.*, p.278.
[8] *Ibid.*, p.275.
[9] *Ibid.*, p.277.
[10] *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, July 1996, p.403.
[11] *Ibid.*, p.402.
[12] *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. II, Geneva, WCC, 1986, p.235.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp.250ff.
[14] *Wales: A Moral Society?*, Cytun: Churches Together in Wales, 1996.
[15] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[16] *Ibid.*, p.7.
[17] *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, July 1993, pp.285f.
[18] Tom Best, *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, July 1996, p.412.
[19] *Ibid.*, p.413.
[20] *On Being the Church*, pp.87ff.

Agents of Renewal and Hope

The Assembly Theme and Africa's Churches

Jonah M. Katoneene

The theme of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches provides promises, challenges, opportunities and hope, not only for Christians and churches at this moment in the history of the WCC but also for other movements and ecumenical organizations worldwide which are committed to the ecumenical movement and its vision. This theme is a call to celebrate a significant milestone in the life of the churches worldwide, to praise and thank God for his faithfulness in the ecumenical journey leading to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the WCC. The theme calls for repentance, rededication and recommitment to God's calling, in trust and obedience. It requires a serious stock-taking by the churches of their vision especially as we approach the 21st century. The churches are challenged to take a critical look at their life, mission, work and witness and that of the whole ecumenical movement in today's world.

The churches in Africa, as in the rest of the world, find themselves called by Christ to serve in a time of rapid change, in which creative developments and intractable problems, opportunities and bitter tragedies are interwoven. Churches are God's instruments of renewal and Christian witness in the struggle for a just and humane society.

The assembly theme calls on churches to engage in a search for a vision of a new society, a society that reflects the values of God's kingdom of love, peace, justice and reconciliation. This search is imperative for the churches in Africa, which in the eyes of many is a bleeding continent. It is a continent struggling to eliminate poverty, illiteracy, hunger and high infant and child mortality rates, civil wars and military conflicts, dictatorships, violations of human rights, the growth of slums, street children and prostitution. It is a continent where AIDS is threatening the very survival of the population – since most of its victims have been youth, children and the middle aged. Africa continues to be plagued by corrupt leaders. Meanwhile, in many government hospitals medicine and doctors are hardly to be found, and many educational institutions are run-down and neglected. The economic situation continues to worsen; and

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the Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed on African governments by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) hit the rural and urban poor the hardest. In a number of countries the situation has led to food riots, threatening peace and stability.

In light of the present situation in Africa, the assembly theme brings a message of hope which recognizes the need for dependence and trust in God in situations of despair and hopelessness. It is a challenge to African Christians and churches to pray, in humility and repentance, for renewal and hope. The theme encourages the churches in Africa to ponder the many agonizing and painful situations in a continent where the last decade of the 20th century began with a wave of democratic movements which shook authoritarian regimes that had hitherto seemed firmly entrenched. We have seen governments removed from power through the ballot box, as in Benin and Zambia.

The agitation for change and more participatory democracy, in which the people in Africa have a say in determining their own destiny, has continued. But the winds of change which ushered in democratic movements have also brought new forms of conflict and political instability. We have seen in many African countries – such as Togo, Cameroon and Kenya – the emergence of social upheavals, ethnic and tribal conflicts which have led to the death of thousands of innocent people, the destruction of property and the displacement of people from their home areas. In others the so-called multi-party democracy seems already to be leading to discontent. Many economies continue to decline and the majority of African people remain impoverished. Unemployment rates, already high, continue to rise. Young people leaving college or university cannot readily find employment.

Within this socio-political and economic environment we raise the question of the meaning of the theme – "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope". It is here that we recognize the need for turning to God, knowing that God is a God of history, a God who sets free those in captivity. A look at the recent history in Africa affirms this. For we need to recognize that the situation in Africa is not all hopeless and dark. We can identify signs of hope even in situations that look desperate and hopeless.

Perhaps the most prominent indication of the hope for Africa is the victory of the Southern African peoples over the evil forces of apartheid and racism. For more than 300 years the South Africans struggled against forces of exploitation and dehumanization. We need to say thank you to God – especially because in the run-up to the election in South Africa, the road towards democracy looked stormy, and the country seemed headed for a civil war. It is through our prayers that the forces of evil and darkness were overcome. The installation of Nelson Mandela as president in South Africa is a sign of hope. Even in situations of despair, God is Lord of history. Freedom and liberation will surely come, though it may take years of suffering and waiting. As a proverb from the Congo says, "No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come".

There are many other examples we could mention where we have seen signs of hope – Mozambique, Malawi, Liberia. While the so-called multi-party democracy seems already to be failing in a majority of African countries, in Uganda a form of democracy is emerging called the "no-party system". Could this be a new model that Africa could adopt? Can we say that Uganda's case is a search for an alternative form of democracy for Africa?

One sign of hope we must mention here is the role of churches in spearheading multi-party democracy. In many countries, where pluralism has been introduced in politics, the churches have been at the forefront of the struggle. This was the case in

Benin, Zambia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. The role played by the churches in South Africa in being the voice of the voiceless – even when the African National Congress was underground – is a sign that God continues to hear cries of the oppressed longing for liberation and freedom.

But how can the churches provide a deeper force to sustain the struggle for a renewed church and society? Can they sustain the renewal to transformation? I think that is the challenge facing African Christians and churches today. During the struggle for nationalism the churches were spiritual forces engaged in the quest of independence. Can the churches provide similar vision and spiritual resources for this search for a renewed society? Or have they become too institutionalized to mobilize the resources at their disposal and be at the cutting edge in renewing our society and providing hope for those in despair?

Our challenge is to see the mission of the churches as being the light and salt of the world, exposing all forces of darkness and networks of evil and destruction. This means taking part in the struggle for a just and humane society, one that includes everyone in the building of the kingdom of God, a society that respects human dignity.

The WCC's jubilee assembly provides opportunity for the churches in Africa and in the rest of the world to reflect on the biblical meaning of jubilee as recorded in Leviticus 25, where the emphasis is placed on the concept of restoration and not on merry-making and joyous celebrations. The biblical concept of jubilee was intended to restore just relationships within the human community.

The assembly theme thus provides an opportunity for the churches in Africa to commit themselves to resist all the forms and structures of injustice, domination and exploitation which have been responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa from the time of slave trade and colonialism to this present age when Africa continues to be controlled by new forms of recolonization through the economic bondage of Structural Adjustment Programmes. It is a time for the churches to unite and call for the cancellation of debt, as the debt has already been paid through the systematic exploitation of African resources (both human and material) for centuries.

Africa remains a rich continent but with poor people. Think of the resources we have – mineral resources such as gold, diamonds, oil, copper and tin, agricultural resources, people. Why then does this continent have poor people? The problem is that mechanisms and systems have been put in place which make it impossible to have a just sharing of our resources.

"Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope" speaks of being agents of renewal and hope. It speaks of repenting from sin, greed, selfishness, corruption and bribery, and carrying the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It means daily dying with Christ and rising with him. It means claiming the power of salvation and giving hope to those who are in despair, purpose of life to those who have lost meaning in life. It means speaking the truth without fear of being imprisoned or losing one's job. It means being ready to suffer and to be crucified, knowing that Jesus calls those blessed who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness – "for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matt. 5:10). A memorable phrase from a lay training centre in Japan describes hope as "the bird that sings of dawn while it is still dark". Despite the pains of change we may go through, churches in Africa are called upon to be birds who will begin to sing songs of hope while it is yet dark, singing in the expectation of the glorious daylight of the liberty coming from God.

"Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope"

Reflections on the Theme of the Eighth Assembly from a Woman's Perspective

Elisabeth Raiser

The next assembly of the World Council of Churches will take place in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the African context – its rich culture and tradition on the one hand, and the suffering of the continent on the other – will be of major importance for this event. In our days Africa is often seen as the "lost continent". The terrible civil wars of recent years, the suffering of the millions of refugees, the droughts or floods, hunger and diseases of all kinds: all this is very present in the media, and in our minds. But the image suggested by these reports does not do justice to Africa; it is one projected by that Western and white way of looking at reality which we find so difficult to overcome.

Perhaps it is also a rather *male* perspective. African women certainly see the suffering around them, and they suffer themselves. They analyze the root causes of this suffering, and describe the devastating effects of economic globalization, neocolonialism, environmental catastrophes and diseases like AIDS. I could continue this list with the critical analyses which women have made of many other issues; but when African women speak, their pride in their culture, their love for their countries, and their joy for life are very often stronger than their expressions of suffering. They tell you about the strong community, and the mutual solidarity in family and village life, which is the base of their self-understanding. They tell you, and make you *feel*, the incredible strength of African women who not only keep life going but, even with the most modest means, bring it to fullness. When one dialogues with them about emancipation and the rights of women they agree to a certain extent, and they act effectively – one of the strongest movements for the emancipation of women worldwide has marked the liberation of South Africa – but African women also insist that in that emancipation process they would never give up their communitarian identity. Transforming without betraying the strength of their African traditions – this is their strat-

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egy. And Christian women witness again and again to how crucial their faith, and their hope in God, are for them in this transformation process, with all its many tensions. The theme of the next assembly, "Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope", seems to speak from their heart.

An African artist has given expression to this language of the heart with a beautiful sculpture inspired by this theme. It depicts a man or woman in deep concentration, expressed by the circle which is formed by the body and by the upraised clasped hands. The head is turned upwards in a movement of openness and expectation, full of confidence and trust. Has she found consolation in his suffering? Are the two strokes on her cheek tears which will be dried? Does this person see God? One of the texts which has served as an inspiration for the assembly theme says:

> Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us... Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth (Hos. 6:1-3).

"Turning to God" implies a conversion of the mind and soul. It begins with looking and seeing things as they really are, with overcoming our blindness. It leads to the refreshing healing which Hosea promises. From a woman's perspective you may ask: What does this conversion imply for men, what does it imply for women? What does healing mean for men, what for women? Is there a difference?

In the context of Hosea, as in most other biblical texts which speak of conversion, it is the men at whom these words are aimed: Hosea invites to conversion those who had killed their brothers in wars and had usurped power. Women had no active share in this; conversion and turning to God implies a different transformation for them. In most cases, "being far from God" does not mean for women being too involved in power games, but rather being caught in the trap of low self-esteem, in doubts, being fearful of responsibility and risk, in depression. The tears of the sculpture may be tears of those women who feel their alienation, and who turn to God in their hope for healing. They may also be the tears of all those who have seen God, and who tremble in front of the new horizon which opens up through this encounter. Or are they the tears of those who feel that they are close to God because, in the unjust conditions in which they are forced to live, God is the only one to whom they can turn? They are close to God since he is always "taking sides" on behalf of the marginalized, the poor, the strangers, the widows and orphans of the Bible. We all know how many people in our own day belong to this group, especially women and children.

Or are *all* these interpretations valid? What makes art so fascinating is that it doesn't tell you what it means, but rather invites you to make your own journey of associations, reflections or questions which are never just "right" or "wrong". Art invites us to a dialogue and to an encounter, as does the Bible. And with this sculpture in mind I try to reread some biblical stories.

The theme begins, "Turn to God". Who is God to whom we turn? How did the women in the Bible experience God so that they were able to affirm the call to "rejoice in hope"? From a woman's point of view, putting the question in that way may immediately raise a first objection: the books of the Bible have been written exclusively by men and they express only a male interpretation of encounters with God, even if occasionally they relate women's experiences. The Song of Songs, which perhaps was written partly by a woman, does not mention the name of God a single time. There-

fore, concludes this argument, there is in the Bible no authentic God-talk on the part of women themselves.

Let me argue against this position. The very fact that the male authors of the scriptures paid attention to some of the encounters of women with God implies that these encounters were particularly powerful, and that the women involved gave an overwhelming witness to them. Their authority was strong enough to convince the writers, and they were different enough from the experiences of men, that it was impossible simply to subsume them under a "male" interpretation. Sometimes encounters of women with God even "complicated" the salvation story, as Elsa Tamez has so convincingly shown us in the case of Hagar.[1] So the real encounters of women with God become transparent in these stories; they are at times so outstanding and even incredible that they simply could not have been invented.

Certainly a feminist hermeneutics which tries to uncover more of these stories, to understand their context in a new way and to regain the deeper understanding of their meaning, is indispensable. Many decades ago research started which has broken the silence which had covered these stories for such a long time. This has allowed the power of those experiences of God reported in these stories to gain a fresh dynamic, one which inspires many women in the ecumenical movement to claim the hope which is expressed in the assembly theme.

So I press the questions: How do women, according to the witness of the Bible, experience God? How does God show himself to women? What does it mean for them when they "turn to him"?

"You are God who sees me" (Gen. 16:13)

It is Hagar, the Egyptian slave of Sarah, who calls God by this name. Remember her story: having been given by Sarah to Abraham to bear a child – as a kind of surrogate mother – she looked down on her mistress who, in turn, treated her badly. Hagar decided rather to die in freedom than to endure this treatment. She ran away from the house, which offered shelter and protection, into the desert. There, close to a spring of water in the wilderness, the angel of God approached her, finally convincing her to return. He also announced to her the birth of a son who would live in the desert, Ishmael, later the father of all desert people. In this situation only a return to slavery could save Hagar's life and that of her son.

And in this situation Hagar gives God a name: "the God who sees".[2] It seems to be an exclamation of joy and surprise about the fact that God has seen *her*, the slave without rights. God has turned to her before she even considered turning to him, and God saves her life, as he will do again later when she has to leave Abraham's house for good and her son is about to die of thirst (Gen. 21:17-19). In this first encounter Hagar spontaneously calls upon God and then returns to Abraham's house, leaving behind her unrealistic dream of freedom. We – in our "enlightened" consciousness – would perhaps have preferred God to offer Hagar her survival in freedom. But God is acting according to the reality of the situation; and Hagar acknowledged that God had "seen" her in her real condition, and not in an ideal one. And finally: Hagar meets God close to a spring of water in the wilderness. In the Middle East, these springs were traditionally places where the goddesses were worshipped, the goddesses who bring fertility and who protect life. Could the life-saving word of the angel of God to Hagar – "Go back to your mistress and submit to her" – be a hidden advice of the goddess?

Today Hagar is very important as a figure with whom many womanist theologians in the USA identify.[3] When North American black women look into their history they see their situation of slavery as similar to Hagar's, and they share her experience of God's presence in life-threatening situations. I have been very moved by the testimony of some of these women, testimony pointing to the struggle for survival and to the liberating experiences of God which their foremothers had. Hagar is for them a "sister in the wilderness"; God "sees" them and is on their side as he was on Hagar's side, even if she "complicated" the story of salvation. The dominant culture and religion, whatever the context may be, has to take up this challenge. This is one of the main messages of this encounter of a woman with God.

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:21, "Miriam's Song")

God is a liberating God

The exodus from the country of slavery, the long march through the desert and finally the entrance into the promised land is the story of the crucial encounter of the people of Israel with God.

Contemporary women theologians have taken the symbol of the Exodus, the march through the desert and the entrance to the promised land to describe the encounters of God experienced by women today, in this time of transition and uncertainty. Miriam with her drum has become an important figure with whom women who are longing for freedom can identify. The experience of the glorious triumph of the Lord who made the liberation of his people possible is crucial for women in their often-difficult search for new role models in a "new land" in which they are autonomous, responsible partners.

But the Exodus and the freedom which it signals can only bring life if the people respect the commitments of the covenant which God has offered them. In the centre of this covenant is the notion of *justice*, which is not basically a legal question, or a matter of calculating rights and wrongs,[4] but a question of relationships which allow everyone to have a fullfilled life. Justice tries to restore broken or unjust relationships. It judges every form of misuse of power, of economic or social exploitation. Its goal is reconciliation, an acknowledgment and forgiveness of guilt and a new beginning, one which builds on renewed and transformed relationships. The Bible is full of admonitions to the people to seek this justice, not primarily for moral reasons but because a fullfilled life is not otherwise possible. This means that the experience of God's liberating acts is linked to the commitment to those who are always in danger of being excluded from the community because they are weak and cannot defend themselves: to the widows and orphans, to the strangers and the poor. The texts always refer to the experience of the people of Israel itself: "You know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9).

"After that, God heeded supplications from the land" (2 Sam. 21:14)

God is a God of justice

In situations of injustice, resistance to the abuses of power is the first step to be taken to restore shalom, that all-encompassing peace of the community. Women had little power and few possibilities to exercise this form of resistance. Nevertheless

some women did act in that way, and they experienced God's support; but they have been largely forgotten in our church tradition, since they did not fit into the "approved" image of womanhood. Consider, for example, Rizpah, the concubine of King Saul: who knows about her? I read of her for the first time only one or two years ago, in a German collection of women's stories and interpretations, and I thought of her as the biblical Antigone. Why was this? Because Rizpah saw her husband, King Saul, die on the battlefield and knew that he was not given an honourable burial. Later her sons were delivered by King David to the Gibeonites and were impaled by them "on the mountain before the Lord", without receiving a proper burial, so that their bodies were lying out in the field (2 Sam. 21:10). Then the story continues:

> Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night. When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, he went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the people of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who had been impaled. They buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish; they did all that the king commanded. After that, God heeded supplications for the land (2 Sam. 21:11-14).

Rizpah had succeeded in converting David, and God confirmed her by liberating the people from the famine which had ravaged the land for three years.

With her courage, her silent vigil and her astonishing political influence Rizpah is the foremother of all the women for peace, the women in black, the mothers who search for their children who have "disappeared" in the prisons and camps of the dictators. She is the foremother of all the women who resist, through their silent witness, the arrogance of power and of war, the foremother of the women who accompany the dying and who know how important a decent burial is for mourning. Rizpah was closer to God than King David with all his power. She experienced God as the God of justice.

"As a mother comforts her child, so I shall comfort you" (Isa. 66:13)
"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you" (Isa. 54:7)

The prophet Isaiah speaks of God in the image of a mother, and talks about God's compassion. The Hebrew word for compassion, *chesed*, is closely related to the word which indicates a woman's womb, where the child is carried and nourished.

God's compassion is understood in terms of such a close relationship as the love of a mother for her unborn child. Even before the child knows her, she knows and loves her child. The child will never fall away from this love; and the Bible suggests that God loves us in this same way. Thus we read in Psalm 139:

> Where can I go from your spirit or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast (vv.7-10).

and later:

> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret (v.15).

One of the most beautiful German Christmas songs, by Paul Gerhard, uses the same image for Jesus' love, saying: "Before I was born you were born to me; you have chosen me before I knew you. Before I was made by your hand, you have meditated how you could become mine".[5] All these are images and metaphors for the motherly love of God. And, like the love of a mother, this encompasses the beginning and the end of life. This brings God close to all the women who are mourning for their beloved ones, women like Rizpah, like the women at the tomb, like the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and close to all of those who resist the forces which destroy life.

I have emphasized this motherly character of God's compassion because, in our traditional understanding, God's compassion is so closely linked to the parable of the prodigal son and the loving, forgiving father (Luke 15:11-32). It is a wonderful parable which tells, so to speak, the theme of the assembly in the form of a story. And the forgiving father offers a comforting image of God, one which counterbalances other, much more severe male images of God in the Bible. This is good. But Jesus did not tell any parable which illustrates God's love through the image of a mother, and we must look for other texts to discover this motherly image. None of these images can ever encompass God's reality – for God is always much more than our imagination can tell. But this discovery – that the God to whom we "turn", and through whom we can "rejoice in hope", also has a feminine and motherly side – includes women in our "God-talk". It invites different and complementary images: different associations and memories complementary to those of the forgiving father. It enriches our reflection on the theme.

"And she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease" (Matt. 5:29)

God is a healing God

The hope for and the experience of salvation and healing are closely related. In German the two words are very similar: *Heil* and *Heilung*. One of our deepest longings is to be healed in body and soul – this is the hope for salvation. For a long time in our Christian tradition this hope was seen mainly as transcendent, a hope for the redemption of our souls, the remission of our sins through Jesus Christ. In this traditional perception the bodily side of healing was somehow neglected, was not considered really important; suffering was, in any case, the fate of human beings in this world. One could try to ease it, and many faithful Christians did this; but in the end only the salvation of the soul was theologically important. For women generally, and for most women theologians in particular, the experience of healing and the hope for salvation have a different meaning. For them the kingdom of God, which promises healing and salvation, is a reality which begins here and now; and in this they are close to all the concepts of liberation theology. Speaking of salvation means first to speak about a very down-to-earth hope for this world and its social and environmental reality. The hope of overcoming the secondary – and so often discriminated against – position of women in patriarchal society is, in this regard, as important as the healing of their hidden, controlled or despised bodies.

This is why, from a woman's perspective, the stories which tell the healings of women are of such importance for the experience and understanding of salvation.

These are the healings which, according to the earliest gospel, that of St Mark, were at the centre of Jesus' ministry and mission. In Jesus, the healing God is present. It has been an important discovery for women that these stories speak about women's bodies which were considered to be religiously "unclean", but which were healed when Jesus touched them – thereby accepting the women in their *bodily* existence. The healing process, that is, not only restored their bodies but helped women to feel fully accepted in their unique identity as children of God, and as full and respected members of the community.

This is shown in the story of the healing of the bleeding woman (Mark 5:24-34, Matt. 9:20-22, Luke 8:43-48). The episode happens in public, on the way from the Sea of Galilee to Jairus's home, where his little daughter lies dying. Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd of people who press against him. A woman who has suffered for twelve years due to haemorrhaging takes the courage to touch Jesus from behind; she tells herself that if she just touches his garment she will be healed. Her audacy is enormous, and for two reasons. First, in an ancient cultural context she was not supposed to go into the street unaccompanied by a male protector, not to mention the fact that she should never touch a man whom she doesn't know. Secondly, in the Jewish context her bleeding placed her in state of constant cultic impurity (see Lev. 15:25-30), meaning not only that she could not participate in cultic activities, but also that she would have "infected" everyone who touched her, who sat on a chair on which she had been sitting, or lay in a bed in which she had slept.

Her illness, then, has placed her outside the religious community and perhaps also isolated her from her family and friends.[6] So when the woman comes from behind and touches Jesus in public – knowing that he would then become unclean himself – she does something quite unheard of. Her hope must have been greater than the taboo which she was breaking. *And her hope did not betray her:* immediately "she felt in her body that she was healed" (Mark 5:29).

But the story does not end here. Jesus was "immediately aware that power had gone forth from him" (Mark 5:30), but he does not know to whom and to where. He could have left it at that, without knowing, but this would have prevented him from entering into a process of healing which involved Jesus in his own full identity, as well as the woman in hers. Therefore he asks the crowd who had touched him. The woman, who has returned to to her conventional role, hides away and remains silent. The disciples comment on the futility of asking such a question – "You see the crowd pressing; how can you say, 'who touched me?'"(5:31) – and this is interesting because ironically it shows that the woman's touch was different from the jostling of the crowd; it was a touch of faith.

Jesus calls her out from her hiddenness and silence. She trembles from fear, how could she not? Her story is so unbelievable, and to speak in public demands such courage on her side, that she can do it only in a gesture of deep humility. She may also feel that she is entering into a new space, into a place where she is a beloved child of God and a transformed, fully accepted member of the human community: such a transformation can indeed make you tremble. In falling down at Jesus' feet and telling her story she is healed in mind and soul; "I am this woman", she says, thus accepting her identity. It is noteworthy that Jesus encourages her to break a second taboo, that which reserved public speech to men. No wonder that Jesus came into conflict with the authorities!

At the conclusion of the story Jesus says to her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." It is as if the healing is completed only now, after the woman has spoken, for being healed from her body's affliction and being healed from her silence are, for this woman as for so many others, two sides of one and the same healing. And Jesus acknowledges by his words that the woman had her own share in this healing process, that she had done well to take the initiative. Healing in this story is a mutual process: in Jesus lives the power of God, but it is set free only in the encounter with others, and these others very often take the initiative, as did this woman. It is a story which illustrates the divine as "power in relation", as Carter Heyward has called it. The healing would not have been possible without the active participation of the woman, and Jesus himself experiences, realizes and enlarges his own power in and through his relation to her.

This story bears a message which is full of hope for many women, and particularly for those suffering from violence. As the team visits midway through the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women have shown once again, violence against women is a terribly widespread phenomenon even in the churches, where it is often hidden and disguised but is now less and less a secret. Women have begun to name this reality and to break the "circle of silence" which has covered it for far too long. Comparative studies, for example those in the context of the United Nations, suggest that violence against women cannot be explained solely on the basis of so-called "external" conditions such as the perpetrator having experienced violence during childhood, or now experiencing frustrations in the work place, or unemployment, alcoholism, poverty, displacement or being a refugee. Rather, violence against women is much more rooted in the lack of recognition of the dignity of women, and of women's bodies.

In most cultures, this state of affairs has not changed since the time of Jesus. Psychological research has made us aware of the cycle of domestic violence, a cycle in which both men and women are caught. Among the three essential stages of this cycle a very important component is the shock of the woman, and her attempt to take upon herself the responsibility for having experienced violence, or to cover it up. There is a mutual dynamic of reinforcement between the silence or inability to speak which expresses the feeling of inferiority on the woman's part, and the silence which expresses the position of power, and the lack of willingness to change, on the part of the man.

For this reason this story in which Jesus encourages the woman to reveal herself, and to speak, is so essential for our understanding of healing. It could release a liberating power in the pastoral care exercised by churches with couples who are caught in the cycle of violence; it could become "gospel", that is, a "good news" which enables change and opens space for renewed life.

"Rejoice in hope"

The second part of the assembly theme speaks of hope. I do not want to add much on this; but clearly the nature of hope is related to our experience of God. It is the hope for wholeness, for liberation, the hope for justice and peace, for love and mercy. In the history of Christian thought hope has often been understood in otherworldly terms, such as the hope for the *parousia*, the "final coming" of God when all tears will be wiped away and we shall live in communion with God in the beauty and peace of

the new Jerusalem. This hope is certainly intended in the theme, and it is a source of inspiration for all of us. It is so radical that we cannot imagine it being realized in our present world, and yet we are sustained by the faith that the kingdom of God which is the object of our hope has already begun.

Turning again to the Bible in order to be inspired by the women present there, I think immediately of Mary and Elizabeth, the two unexpectedly pregnant women who, meeting each other, are empowered through their encounter for the radical hope which is reflected in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). In the perspective of this hope, the conditions of the world are turned upside down. Such hope presents an alternative to the dominant world-view; this alternative retains its challenging character and does not become outdated. Sometimes it is surprising that this hope continues to inspire people.

At the same time there is the incredible experience that, even in the worst situations, people are again and again supported by this hope and thus can give a truly revolutionary testimony like the Magnificat. It is as if overpowering suffering could generate just that boundless energy and confidence we have encountered in the biblical stories. Specifically I think of the social movements at the grassroots which resist the arrogance of power, and struggle tirelessely for an alternative, democratic and humane form of life. I also think of the many groups of women who struggle to safeguard women's rights and to win respect for women's lives, and I think of the groups within the churches which are advocates for renewal. All over the world they establish networks of mutual solidarity and they are, for me, the carriers of the hope of which the assembly theme speaks.

NOTES

[1] Elsa Tamez, "The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation", in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter, eds, Geneva, WCC, 1986, pp.5-17.

[2] I follow here the translation of the Jerusalem Bible.

[3] See e. g. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1993.

[4] Thomas F. Best, "'Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope': An Approach to the Theme of the Eighth Assembly of the WCC", in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1996, p.408; reprint 1997, p.8.

[5] The German original is: *Als ich noch nicht geboren war, da bist du mir geboren und hast mich dir zu eigen gar, eh ich dich kannt, erkoren. Eh ich von deiner Hand gemacht, da hast du schon bei dir bedacht, wie du mein wolltest werden.*

[6] Cf. the article on Mark by Mary Ann Tolbert in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds, London, SPCK, 1992, p.267.

The Jubilee Challenge

Th. Marius van Leeuwen

A review of Hans Ucko (editor), ***The Jubilee Challenge – Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights,*** *Geneva, WCC Publications, 1997, 206pp., Sfr22.50, US$15.90, £9.95.*

The fiftieth anniversary of the World Council of Churches has almost inevitably come to be associated with the biblical jubilee: "You shall count seven weeks of years, that is seven times seven years, forty-nine years... And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you" (Lev. 25:8, 10). Once this association is made, however, the question arises whether and how laws which derive from a world so totally different from ours can be applied in today's world. Should the WCC, as has been suggested, proclaim an "ecumenical jubilee year" in which, by analogy with the biblical proclamation of liberation, old doctrinal anathemas are lifted? Should it adhere to the original setting of the biblical jubilee, that of ecology and economic relief? Is it legitimate at all that the assembly of a Christian organization should appropriate a theme that seems to belong primarily to the Jewish legacy? In the words of WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser, how can a reinterpretation be done "without continuing the history of Christian expropriation of the traditions of the Jewish people"? (p.16; all page references in what follows are from the book under review).

To answer that question it is first necessary to learn how the Jewish people have understood the ideas of the sabbatical year and the jubilee. With that in mind, the WCC's Ecumenical Institute in Bossey convoked a conference of Jews and Christians on these questions in May 1996. The seventeen contributions to that meeting, edited and introduced by Hans Ucko, offer a fascinating survey of the many different interpretations and evaluations of the jubilee motif, both in the Jewish and the Christian traditions, both historical and contemporary.

The biblical context

Let us begin where most of the contributors to *The Jubilee Challenge* do: the biblical texts. The regulations on sabbatical and jubilee years probably go back to a very early date, when Israel lived "under simple economic and social conditions" (Leon Klenicki, p.43). They evolved over some hundreds of years, adapting to the changing socio-economic situation. The well-known texts in Exodus 21 and 23 and Deuteron-

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omy 15 (on the sabbatical year) and in Leviticus 25 (on sabbatical and jubilee) stem from different stages in this development. The latest, the jubilee text in Leviticus 25, is part of the Priestly code, presumably written down towards the end of the exile. The result of this long history is a set of texts which, as Norman K. Gottwald rightly says, hardly fit "into a single harmonized system" (p.34). There are four elements, which at different moments in the history were emphasized differently.

1. The most original notion seems to be that of a sabbath rest for the land and its people. In the sabbatical year the land must be left fallow (Ex. 23:10-11). Likewise, in the year of jubilee, which is a kind of intensified sabbatical, "you shall not sow..., nor shall you gather in the grapes from the unpruned vines" (Lev. 25:11). To this, two rules were added concerning liberation and remission:

2. Israelites reduced to poverty who had sold themselves as slaves to their countrymen must be released. According to Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12 this should be done in the seventh year. Leviticus 25:40f. issues the same prescription for the year of jubilee.

3. In the sabbath year debts must be remitted: "everyone who holds a pledge shall remit the pledge of anyone indebted to him" (Deut. 15:2). Leviticus 25 does not explicitly emphasize this prescription for the jubilee. Probably it went without saying that it applied then as well.

4. Finally, the jubilee law in Leviticus 25:23-28 adds to all this that land which had to be sold in bad times must be returned to its original owner. Indeed, no land was to be sold outright, because the land is the Lord's (Lev. 25:23).

The apparent idea behind all these measures was to give to the land and the people possibilities of recovery and new beginning, and to prevent unfortunate circumstances (debts, slavery, loss of land) from becoming an inescapable fate passed on from generation to generation. But were the laws ever kept? Were they seen as a real possibility? Was the jubilee law – which seems on the one hand to be a weakening of the earlier sabbath year regulation (because of the 50-year rhythm) but on the other hand a more radical proposal, with its focus on the original distribution of land – ever implemented? Or has it always been a utopia?

Jewish interpretations

Against the prevailing opinion that the jubilee law was never practised, Gottwald suggests that it may have been seen as "a workable programme of restoration" at least once – in the years after the edict of Cyrus, 538 B.C.E., when the first exiles returned home (pp.36f.). Likewise, Klenicki finds indications in Nehemiah that the sabbath and jubilee prescriptions offered, a hundred years later, a model for economic restoration (pp.41-43). Other authors are less certain that Neh. 5:1-13 or 10:31 have to do with a sabbatical or jubilee year. In any case, after the fifth century B.C.E. the jubilee law in its totality was certainly not observed, the social and political situation of Israel being too complex for its implementation.

This is not to say that none of the four rules mentioned above was inoperative. Both Klenicki and Raphael Jospe show this in their very readable essays. The rabbinic authorities in the last centuries B.C.E. decided that the prescription that the land should lie fallow remained valid, albeit only in the land of Israel itself, because of the words "when you enter the land which I give you..." (Lev. 25:2). "Fallow ploughing" (ploughing without sowing) remained a practice in Israel every seventh year up to Tal-

mudic times. Agronomically, this was a prudent practice, as is shown in the contribution by Yehuda Feliks, an expert in biblical and Talmudic botany.

During these last centuries B.C.E. the rules regarding the release of Jewish slaves and the remittance of debts also remained valid. These were to be implemented every seventh year, both in the land of Israel and in the diaspora. Jospe cites Maimonides, who wrote centuries later that "the release of debts [in the sabbatical year] is operative in every place, although the jubilee is not operative, so that the Torah of release of debts might not be forgotten" (p.92). That this prescription from the Torah was operative is proved by the institution of the *prosbul* by Rabbi Hillel the Elder (second century) in order to meet the problem already alluded to in Deuteronomy 15:9: "Be careful for help. See that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near', and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing." The *prosbul* provided that the creditor would deliver his claim for payment of the loan by the other person to the court, thus circumventing the rule of remission, which the rabbis interpreted as applying only to persons and not between a person and an institution (cf. Klenicki, pp.46f.; Jospe, p.93; Solomon, p.154).

So, while these three rules, which were common to the sabbatical and the jubilee year, were practised in the period directly after the Old Testament, the provision that is most specific to the jubilee – the restoration of lost land to the original owner – was not. The idea seems to be rooted in ancient times, when each Israelite clan had its own plot of land (Jacob Milgrom, p.28), and presupposes an ideal situation in which the population is stable (cf. Solomon, p.151). When these rules were written down, that may still have been the case to a certain extent, but it soon came to an end. And who would say that it is practicable today? We may find here a guideline for thinking about the rights of certain aboriginal peoples. But in present-day Israel, to take the most obvious example, all claims of "original ownership" seem to provide ammunition for dangerous political conflict. In this respect, Gottwald's questions about the idea of using the "original-owner-principle" as a guideline for a programme of land reform today are pertinent: How will jurisdictional disputes over ownership be settled? Are we sure that claims are based on legitimate rights rather than on the power of a privileged class? What role does religion play? Does it facilitate a meaningful reform or does it obstruct it by uncompromising traditionalism? (pp.38-40).

The Jewish contributors to *The Jubilee Challenge* see the full application of the rules on the sabbatical and jubilee years as a matter of eschatology: "an ideal programme that awaits fulfilment in the days of the Messiah" (Solomon, p.151). According to Jospe, the sabbatical year is a reminiscence, and its revival is "a feature of the messianic era". Every time the sabbatical year approaches, Jews in the state of Israel debate whether it is their task to initiate such a revival (and bring the messianic era nearer), or whether they should await the Messiah who will restore the sabbath year (Jospe, p.95).

Christian reinterpretation

Expressing concern "about the use and abuse of biblical laws", Klenicki recommends prudence – "a theological virtue that seems to have disappeared from religious organizations" (p.51). He stresses that the concepts of sabbatical year and jubilee "belong to a moment of Jewish history" and refer to the Jewish calendar. Though he does not say so explicitly, it would seem to follow that the proclamation of a jubilee on

the occasion of the WCC's 50th anniversary would be completely off the mark. Furthermore, he suggests that when people who do not otherwise follow the Torah use certain parts of it to give a religious touch to political or social views which they derive from common reasoning, they are in fact using "the text as a pretext" and abusing it.

While *The Jubilee Challenge* does not record the discussions that this sort of remark must have provoked at the original conference, some of the counter-arguments are found in the texts.

Obviously inspired by such studies as *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), by the late John H. Yoder, both Konrad Raiser and Jacques Nicole dispute the claims that the sabbatical year and jubilee belong exclusively to Jewish history and that their reference is primarily to the Jewish calendar. Each of them refers to a moment that belonged to both Jewish history and the history of Christianity: Jesus' first public appearance in the synagogue of Nazareth. According to Luke 4 he proclaimed the jubilee year, or, more precisely, "the year of the Lord's favour" (Isa. 61:2): release for prisoners, freedom for the oppressed, good news for the poor. This proclamation of the jubilee was apparently Jesus' programme. But while his proclamation was rooted in the original jubilee tradition, Raiser says, Jesus reinterpreted this tradition, transforming "the utopian legislation of Leviticus 25 into a powerful prophetic vision of the new life in community in the horizon of the kingdom of God" (p.23). While proclaiming the coming of that kingdom in which the jubilee dreams will at last come true – debts will be cancelled, slaves released, all people will have access to life in fullness – Jesus stressed the *presence* of the kingdom: it is "among you". It is a programme for *now*: "Now is the time of liberation, remission, forgiveness, reconciliation" (p.23).

So Jesus reinterpreted the jubilee motif as a message of new life, characterized by more intense hope and more radical responsibility. Nicole underscores another aspect of this reinterpretation. In the Torah the force of the sabbatical and jubilee laws was explicitly confined to Israelites: "when your brother-Israelite is reduced to poverty..."; "you may press foreigners; but if it is a fellow-countryman that holds anything of yours, you must remit all claim upon it". In Luke 4 "the advantages of the jubilee are explicitly extended to foreigners" (p.54). Jesus' words of grace are not primarily for the advantage of the people of his own country or town (cf. Luke 4:22-27).

In other words, the appropriation of the jubilee theme is not a modern or trendy idea but was a part of the Christian tradition from the beginning. But it was modified: the idea of the presence of the kingdom, the "eschatological now", put the periodization of the sabbatical and the jubilee year in a new perspective. In fact, "any moment can become the year of God's favour, the time of salvation" (Raiser, p.23). In answer to Klenicki, one might say that for Christians any moment can become "the year of jubilee". The proclamation of such a year is thus independent of any calendar; and there seems to be no problem with proclaiming a jubilee in either 1998 or 2000. But one might also take another position: when any moment can become "the jubilee", does it make sense to speak any longer in terms of jubilee or sabbatical years? Lukas Vischer puts the question this way: "Is it possible to speak in any way of sabbatical and jubilee years after Christ?" (p.147). In the Christian view, was not the coming of Jesus the definitive moment of renewal? What can be added to it by festive years? Should Christians not rather proclaim the coming of the ultimate kingdom and try to live *now* in accordance to the rules of that kingdom of love?

Vischer's essay is a reminder that a Christian appropriation of the jubilee is not something that goes without saying. Is it not true that the theological context in which Christians perceive the theme is a new one? Orthodox theologian K.M. George suggests that the Christian jubilee, as "the fiftieth", is Pentecost: where the Holy Spirit is, there is the jubilee. Can Christians transfer the liturgical context in which the jubilee regulations of Leviticus 25 were placed ("on the Day of Atonement you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land"; v.9) to their own liturgical traditions today? And who are the celebrants of the jubilee? "The prescriptions in Leviticus were addressed to the people as a whole... If the churches proclaim a jubilee year today, its celebrants are a minority set over against society as a whole" (Vischer, pp.145f.).

Vischer raises substantial questions. But the main questions in *The Jubilee Challenge* remain these: Can regulations that had their place in an ancient agricultural society really be applied to the complex world of today? How are we to translate them without abusing them as a pretext for our own worldly-wise views – or ideologies? Are we not in danger of transforming what was intended to be realistic legislation into something of mere utopian quality?

In search of basic principles

While the views of the authors of *The Jubilee Challenge* diverge widely, they all agree that the biblical laws on the jubilee cannot be applied directly to the contemporary situation. In a sense they are indeed utopian, as they have their roots in a world which has passed and await for their full application the coming of the Messiah or the kingdom of God. Meanwhile, they may prove relevant if we discern their critical function towards the present world and extract from them "certain basic principles on which we can build an approach to modern problems" (Solomon, p.151).

Certainly, Leviticus 25 sounds like a utopia. Perhaps no society could survive if these rules were really applied. Moreover, the time of utopian programmes seems over: we have seen how easily they become violent ideologies (cf. Vischer, p.148). But Raiser argues that real utopias are not meant to be enforced ideologically. Rather, their role is to unmask the hidden ideological structures in our world. They serve as "a critical test for the existing reality" (p.20). The "otherness" of utopian images may reveal what is wrong in the present course of events, setting aside the idea that it is "normal" and inevitable and mobilizing hopes that things can be done otherwise and better.

We may summarize the underlying critical principles in the jubilee rules as follows:

1. The idea behind the jubilee was to prevent unfortunate circumstances from becoming an inescapable fate and to give those at risk of permanent exclusion the chance to make a new beginning. The basic principle here is a choice for the poor and the victims, those who live "in 'a culture of silence', their voices muted and only obliquely heard in the official records" (Gottwald, p.34). Applying this principle, Indonesian theologian Joseph P. Widyatmadja urges the necessity of redescribing the history of old and new colonization from "the people's perspective" (p. 179).

2. To reverse the widening of the gap between those who have power and opportunity and those who do not, there must be a limit to power "as exercised in domination over people, as accumulation of capital and wealth, and as exploitation of natural resources" (Raiser, p.25). God alone is the source of all power, and the land, the basis of human wealth and power, is his (Lev. 25:23). This affirmation sets a limit to human

claims of ownership and to the seemingly limitless power of a small number of people to acquire ever more resources.

In his chapter "Evaluating the Triumph of the Market", Ronald Sider calls the widespread notion that economic growth as such will improve life an absurdity. Who will enjoy the benefits? For whom will life improve? And what exactly is a "good" or "better" life? Does it really have anything to do with "an ever-increasing supply of material things" (p.128)? Sider attributes the preoccupation with economic growth to the fact that "modern people cast aside the limits imposed on economic life by the biblical truth that Yahweh is Lord even of economics" (p.127).

More practically, Sider suggests that the idea of giving chances to the poor should not be worked out in large-scale plans of debt-remittal (the question is again: who will benefit?), but by an extensive programme of granting micro-loans, "capital to the poor" (p.120). Sider's suggestion that the pure rule of the market corrupts culture "by rewarding immoral actions" and counting them on the positive side of the ledger of "economic growth" (p.119) has an echo in an impressive essay by Carmelita M. Usog from the Philippines. How can those in power "allow prime agricultural lands to be converted into golf courses?", she asks. How can they allow sex tours to be "a 'promising business'" (pp.191-93).

3. Sabbath, sabbatical year and jubilee have to do with the interruption of the continuing movement of time. To this theme some interesting essays are devoted. In a way reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz speaks of "the corrective quality of time". The jubilee symbolizes that everything human has its (finite) time. It puts a limit to the accumulation both of misery and of wealth: "the miseries of some and the fortunes of others cannot be carried endlessly beyond inter-generational lines." This leads him to a criticism of the main idolatry of our time: "the undisputed concept of the eternal life of money." Should we not affirm that "in a finite world everything must be finite"? Is it not only God who is infinite? In other words (to cite the title of the essay) should there not be "Time Ceilings for the Growth of Money"? (pp.104-11).

Geraldine Smyth associates the idea of an interruption of the endless progress of time with the distinction between linear or "male" and cyclical or "maternal" time. The former "determines the world of work, politics and commerce" (p.67). But it risks becoming a time of violence, when there are no stops, no periods of rest, when no one interrupts the apparently normal course of events to shout: "Stop!" or "Enough!".

Christians often opt for an image of time as an ongoing movement in the direction of an eschaton. But if this "linear" idea of time is linked to the evils of endless accumulation of wealth, violent ambition and ruthless exploitation of the creation, should we not learn from what has been called Israel's greatest gift to humanity: the wisdom of the sabbath, the recurring moment of rest? And should we not also try to learn from the symbolic potential of that other instrument of interruption: the jubilee?

The Jubilee Challenge is a rich book, providing much food for thought on both the biblical, theological and historical backgrounds and the economic and political implications of the jubilee. It honestly reports on the abuses of the jubilee (crusades, p.55) and the risk that its proclamation will fail (for example, the 1995 jubilee in Korea did not accomplish reunification; pp.24,60; the Swiss churches' "jubilee year 1991" was not all that successful; pp.141-44). But equally honest is the attempt to answer the question, posed in Hans Ucko's introduction: "Is the jubilee vision a resource and a possibility for a new discourse on societal values?" And after all, this attempt is a promising one.

Ecumenical Chronicle

"UT UNUM SINT": A RESPONSE FROM FAITH AND ORDER

This response is offered as an expression of the gratitude of the Board of Faith and Order for the encyclical Ut Unum Sint *and an indication of ways in which the encyclical is in harmony with the work of the Faith and Order commission. It does not purport to represent the views of member churches of the WCC, many of which are responding to the encyclical in their own name and at greater length. All the work of Faith and Order is directed to that commitment to the search for visible unity which the encyclical urges upon the churches.*

The encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* appears to us in the Faith and Order commission to be a form of ecclesial reception which truly receives and opens up positively the themes of the Second Vatical Council, particularly *Unitatis Redintegratio.* We particularly wish to acknowledge the spirit of humility which runs through the encyclical, and which comes out so clearly in expressions like "dialogue of consciences" (para. 34), "dialogue of conversion" and "our acknowledgement, jointly and to each other, that we are men and women who have sinned" (para. 35). Coming from the bishop of Rome, it has the special significance of confirming his own and his church's ongoing commitment to the search for visible unity and his support for all those who strive for the unity of all Christians. The text acknowledges that "ecumenism is an organic part of (the Church's) life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does" (para. 20).

We in the Faith and Order commission are grateful for the recognition given to our work throughout the encyclical letter. This recognition of Faith and Order work implies a relationship with all ecclesial communities engaged in the ecumenical task. The acknowledgement that the churches cannot reach the goal of full visible unity without one another's help, and that such "mutual help in the search for truth is a sublime form of evangelical charity" (para. 78) coincides fully with the conviction of the Faith and Order commission. Although the text states that "because of the lack of the Sacrament of Orders" the post-Reformation communities "have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the eucharistic mystery" (para. 67), we particularly appreciate the fact that "our brotherhood" is said to be "rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism" as the basis of our belonging to one another, together with the positive reference to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (para. 42). Similarly, we are thankful for the insistence on the cooperation of Christians in the service of humanity as witnessing to the gospel (para. 43).

Ut Unum Sint conveys a sense of movement and the intention to continue moving until full visible unity is reached. Movement implies, as the text states, "the need for interior conversion" (para. 15) and for "continual reformation" (para. 16). These phrases, in our understanding, refer to what the Orthodox churches mean by "metanoia". Moreover, it is stressed that conversion must not only be personal but must also have a communal aspect (para. 15). The letter urges repentance not only for personal sins committed against the church's unity, but also for "social sins, which is to say the sinful 'structures' themselves which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcing of division" (para. 34). How can we not recognize that some of our structures, particularly structures of power, are not of the gospel, and therefore not of the church of God, but rather are infiltrations of categories of this world?

The Faith and Order commission considers it is duty to continue its work in the spirit of *Ut Unum Sint* with its emphasis on seeking "the necessary and sufficient visible unity" (para. 78) and therefore on not imposing on one another any burden beyond what is strictly necessary (cf. Acts 15:28). We agree that instead of being opposed to Christian unity, legitimate diversity enriches it (para. 50), and can actually be regarded as a manifestation of

God's providence (para. 57). We also observe that member churches vary in their understanding of what degree of diversity is legitimate.

We appreciate the combination of personal courtesy and theological candour with which the encyclical speaks of other "Churches and Ecclesial Communities" (e.g. in para. 64). We understand that from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church "The elements of (the) already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other Communities" (para. 14) and that not all ministries of word and sacraments in these communities can at present be recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as being in accordance with God's purpose for the church. It will of course be clear from the various bilateral dialogues of churches with the Roman Catholic Church and with one another that these churches believe themselves to be true churches within the wholeness of the church of Jesus Christ, though hoping to receive gifts from one another in progress to the visible unity of the church. From this position they naturally find unsatisfactory some of the references to them in the encyclical. At the same time, we see in the statement that the martyrs who died for their Christian faith, no matter which Christian tradition they belong to, as well as the saints of all our traditions, are already in perfect communion (para. 84), a very welcome attempt to locate the holiness of the church beyond the boundaries of any one church.

As the Faith and Order commission pursues its work on ecclesiology, we are happy to discover that the issues we are grappling with are also raised in *Ut Unum Sint.* In particular, as was requested at the fifth world conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993), we intend to study the question of primacy, which is acknowledged in the text as "a difficulty for most other Christians whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections" (para. 88). It is significant that the letter refers to a ministry of unity which is not one of power, but one of service. In this respect, we are glad that the bishop of Rome appropriates the remarkable expression of his great predecessor, Gregory 1, "*servus servorum Dei*", in relation to his ministry. However, while we take seriously this understanding of universal primacy, as offered in *Ut Unum Sint,* in our work in Faith and Order, we must continue to investigate, in terms of the position of some member churches, the prior question whether there is need, or is not, for a universal primacy in the organizational dimension of the life of the church of God on earth.

We are glad to receive (para. 79) a clear indication that the question of primacy is one of a series of important issues for fuller study. We agree that those listed require our attention, along with other questions put before the Faith and Order commission by member churches of the WCC.

In conclusion we affirm with joy our sense of real progress in the dialogue and mutual understanding of the churches. In no way do we underestimate the difficulties, both old and new, in the way of that developing progress, but we continue our work, encouraged by this encyclical and by other signs of support from the churches. Truly we are engaged together in the quest for that holiness which finds its expression in the dedicated lives of those who have borne their witness even to the point of death for their faith.

Book Reviews

Raindrops of My Life: The Memoir of Florence Tim Oi Li. Toronto, Ont., Anglican Book Centre, 1996, 128pp., $11.95.

Questions about the status and roles of women in the church have been on the ecumenical agenda since the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, while since the 1970s the question of the ordination of women has at times strained relations between – as well as within – churches and confessions. Within the Anglican Communion the ordination of women to the priesthood has been the subject of much debate and a certain degree of controversy. Although women priests (and in some cases bishops) are now accepted in a number of Anglican churches around the world, it is still not widely known that the first ordination of a woman to the Anglican priesthood took place over fifty years ago.

On the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul (25 January) 1944 Florence Li Tim-Oi, a Chinese deaconess, was ordained by Bishop Ronald Hall in the Anglican Church in Hsinxing in Guandong, China. Her ordination was to enable her to carry out a sacramental ministry with refugees from the Sino-Japanese war who had managed to reach the Portuguese colony of Macau, where she had been serving as a deacon. Because of war-time conditions news of this ordination was slow to reach the rest of the world; but when it did, reaction from the Archbishop of Canterbury was decidedly negative and, meeting after the war, the Chinese bishops censured Bishop Hall. In 1946, faced with the ultimatum that either she must resign the title of priest or Bishop Hall must resign as bishop, Li Tim-Oi surrendered her licence as priest while always insisting that she had not resigned from holy orders. *Raindrops of my Life* is the memoir of this remarkable woman, the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion, who was born in Hong Kong in 1907 and died in Toronto, Canada, in 1992.

After leaving Macau in 1947 Li Tim-Oi served as rector of a church in Hepu, China, until it was closed in 1951. From then on her life was deeply affected by the turbulent events in China and the growing restrictions on Christians and their churches which culminated in the terrors of the Cultural Revolution. Li Tim-Oi laboured on a farm commune, worked for many years in a factory, and experienced a year of political re-education which included hard physical labour. In 1979 churches in China were allowed to reopen and in 1981, after waiting for seven years, Li Tim-Oi was granted a visa to travel overseas to visit family members whom she had not seen for many years. Then in her seventies and with no family in China to care for her, Li accepted the invitation of relatives to live with them in Canada. There her priesthood was recognized, as the Anglican Church in Canada had ordained women since 1976, and in spite of her age Li served as a priest in parishes in Montreal and Toronto.

In January 1984 the fortieth anniversary of Li Tim-Oi's ordination was marked by celebrations in Toronto and by a thanksgiving service in Westminster Abbey in London at which Li was joined by fifteen women priests from overseas Anglican churches, many deaconesses from all over Britain, eleven male bishops and a congregation of over one thousand. From then on she had a higher public profile and, although never an ardent feminist, was very active in her support of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in England. She travelled widely and made a return trip to China about which a video was made; she collaborated with a journalist who wrote a book about her; she received two honorary doctorates and was a special guest at the 1988 Lambeth Conference.

Raindrops of My Life is Li Tim-Oi's story, told simply in her own words and based on her memories rather than on written records. It is divided into four sections, two dealing with her life in Hong Kong and China and two with her life after she left China. The circumstances surrounding her ordination and the dangers and difficulties of the years from 1947 to 1980 are described only briefly; the significance of her ordination, and Anglican reactions to it, are dealt with more fully in *Much Beloved Daughter* by Ted Harrison (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985).

The memoir is supplemented by a helpful brief chronology of the Christian Church in China after 1949, by a remembrance of her later years and final illness by her sister, and by sermons preached on the golden jubilee of her ordination by Archbishop Ted Scott of the Anglican Church of Canada and by the Archbishop of York. A third sermon by Christopher Hall, son of the bishop who ordained Li Tim-Oi, recalls that his father was tempted to rename her "Cornelia" because he saw a close parallel between the first baptized gentile and the first woman priest.

All descriptions of Tim-Oi emphasize her humility, her obedience, and her faithfulness and these qualities shine through her own words. Although she made history in the church, she saw her own personal prestige as worthless "for I was merely a small servant of the Lord" (p.22) and she frequently referred to herself, in the words of Psalm 22, as "a worm". *Raindrops of my Life* introduces readers to the story of this remarkable woman told in a simple personal style with little introspection or analysis. It should appeal to those interested in the ordination of women and in the history of the Anglican Communion.

Janet Crawford

Janet Crawford is a member of the WCC Faith and Order commission and lectures in church history at the College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland, New Zealand.

Andrew Chandler, ed., *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis of German Protestantism, 1933-1939*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, Boydell Press, 1997, 185pp., £35.00.

After Dr Willem A. Visser 't Hooft had retired as the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches, he invited from time to time younger staff members to his house where they would be introduced into the history of the ecumenical movement. Visser 't Hooft was afraid that the past and its lessons were too easily forgotten. If I remember correctly, Bishop George Bell was the only one for whom we needed two long evening sessions – for all the other pioneers one meeting had to suffice. Since I had been privileged to watch the Bishop of Chichester, the chairman of the WCC central committee, as a young steward at the Evanston assembly in 1954 and knew him as one of the closest friends of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, my interest in new insights of this great Christian leader has never ceased.

Now Andrew Chandler, director of the George Bell Institute in Birmingham (who in 1991 wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on "The Church of England and Nazi Germany 1933-1945"), presents on behalf of the Church of England Record Society a remarkable volume. A first glance at the documents leads one to ask whether it is justified to use the name of Bell so prominently in the sub-title. Of altogether 30 documents only 10 are from Bell. Looking, however, at the length of these pieces (about one third of the papers), and trying to estimate their importance, one has to admit that they are the most interesting and relevant parts of the book. Nathan Söderblom's remark of 1925 (Stockholm) "This Bell never rings for nothing" rings true throughout this volume.

In order to assess it one has to consider how the author deals with the texts which he is editing. First of all, he gives his personal introduction in about 30 pages; describing this "ecumenical century", he compares English and German Protestantism and gives a good summary of the German church struggle from 1933-1939. I agree with the observation "that while English Christians lacked a cultural understanding of German Protestantism, they were soon familiar with the narrative details of the controversy..." Then he evaluates the insights gained in the Church of England, the controversies within the newly established Archbishop of Canterbury's Council on Foreign Relations and at the Church assembly, and the reactions of the Church. Then Chandler explains the criteria for selecting precisely those 39 documents out of an overwhelming wealth of collected papers of Bishop Bell and Archbishop Long (who wrote 9 of the papers available here – a comparison of Bell and Long shows how closely they cooperated and how much they were in agreement). Chandler further helps the reader by providing (a) before the texts, chronologies each of the 7 years; (b) an appendix with nearly 100 biographies; and (c) a selective bibliography. All this provides an access to the rich material of a time which, to some, now seems far away.

To my regret the book is not free from mistakes. A few examples: the famous Barmen declaration was not adopted by the Synod of the Rhineland on 19 February 1934, but by the Synod of the entire Confessing Church at Barmen on May 31 of the same year. Quite a few

errors and inconsistencies appear in the biographies of German politicians, theologians and church leaders. Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher is not Gottfried Adolf Krummacher, Otto Dibelius was General Superintendent, Hans Wahl was never a pastor but church administrator; Heckel and Hossenfelder unfortunately were bishops, not just pastors – they might have done less harm as pastors! The concentration camp was in Sachsenhausen, not in Sachsenberg. I would have omitted this incorrect explanation "...the Huguenot Church was only a very small Christian sect." In addition I wonder why, for an important publication like this, it was not possible to let a German colleague look into the proofs in order to avoid those mistakes and the mis-spellings of German words.

One of my chief reasons for recommending this book – and hoping for a continuation*, if possible including the post-war activities of Bishop Bell, as Edwin Robertson does in his moving book *Unshakeable Friend. George Bell and the German Churches,* London 1995 – is the question raised by Bishop Bell in a memorandum of February 1937 ("Private and Confidential", 13 pages!) and still very much with us: "How can foreign churches help?" This problem was under serious discussion within the Church of England itself. Arthur C. Headlam, since 1923 bishop of Gloucester, was not only against the formation of a World Council of Churches, but was rather open to the political developments in Nazi Germany; he "was the leading Christian apologist for the German government", writes Kenneth Slack in his Bell biography of 1971. Now one can read in six documents his sharp criticism of the Confessing Church, of Martin Niemöller (he is a "truculent sailor" – referring to the fact that he was sub-marine commander in World War I) and of the attitude of Archbishop Long and Bishop Bell over against Hitler. How is it possible that under such opposition the prophetic voices can prevail? How far is interference in political developments in other countries possible, advisable and helpful? And how can information collected in a church as divided as the German church in and after 1933 be interpreted and used in order to find the truth? Is it justifiable to go to the lion's den and approach enemies of the other church directly? Questions of this kind cannot be solved simply by stating general principles. However, I share the hope of Visser 't Hooft that remembering the past may help us to face the challenges laid before the ecumenical movement today.

* One should note that Bell's diary notes from his visit to Sweden about his last meeting with Bonhoeffer and the subsequent dealings with Sir Anthony Eden about the German resistance movement (they "were among the most dramatic moments in his life", write Gordon Rupp, 1975) have been very carefully edited in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, Vol. 16, 1996.

Reinhard Groscurth

Reinhard Groscurth worked on the staff of Faith and Order from 1966 to 1969 and became ecumenical officer of the Evangelical Church of the Union in Berlin. He now lives in retirement in Bremen.

Hee-Mo Yim, *Unity Lost – Unity to be Regained in Korean Presbyterianism*, European University Studies, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1996, pp.250, DM79.00.

Korea was known as "The Land of the Morning Calm" until the Christian gospel awakened our country. This was a turning point in Korean history, one which opened a new chapter for Korean culture and faith. When the gospel spread in Korea through Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, the enthusiasm for the Christian faith which emerged involved both hopes for the nation's independence from Japanese colonialism, and personal salvation through Jesus Christ. During the time of Japanese colonialism, the unity of the church was remarkably strong. There were no church divisions until the liberation of Korea.

Yet the division of the Korean churches, when it did appear right after the liberation of 1945, was extremely serious. In particular the Presbyterian churches, which predominate in Korea, had a serious church split after the Korean war. The original reasons for the church split were two-fold: first, a serious doctrinal argument between fundamentalists and liberals; and second, the factor of regionalism. Since this split, the search for unity is being very actively pursued, particularly through the ecumenical movement. Various processes, involving theological dialogue and common Christian activities, have attempted to unify the churches; but so far these have not succeeded. Finally, the liturgical movement is becoming a focal point for the search for unity

(as seen for example in the "Lima liturgy" produced by Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982).

Mr Hee-Mo Yim's book is a good effort to set forth the history of the Korean church in relation to the divisions among the churches, combined with new ideas for realizing church unity through the sacraments. Thus the first part of the book presents the causes for the division of the church in Korea, with Part II describing movements for church union.

Part III attempts to present the sacraments of eucharist and baptism as a unique "channel" for the unity of the Korean church. This idea is both very appropriate and practical: the Korean churches *can* come together in the sacraments. A deeply inspiring example is the fact that eight Presbyterian churches gathered a few years ago to have a jubilee celebration in which they took the eucharist together.

This book will contribute to the understanding of the history of the church in Korea, and the reality of the divisions within the churches there. Furthermore, the focus on unity in this book will give further impetus to the search for church unity in Korea. It strongly urges Korean church leaders to "open the doors of dialogue" among the different Presbyterian churches; here there is much cause for hope, because there is no fundamental difference in how the sacraments of the Lord's supper and baptism are experienced.

Two critical comments should be made. First, as the writer only touches on many aspects of the story readers will probably feel they have had merely a survey of the Korean church rather than a detailed, in-depth study. Second, the author does not approach the history from a sufficiently critical point of view and thus does not provide the nuanced analysis of the Korean church in which readers would surely be interested.

Despite these criticisms this reviewer, as a former professor of Mr Yim, is delighted to read this very helpful production which will give a new direction and impulse towards the unity of the Korean church.

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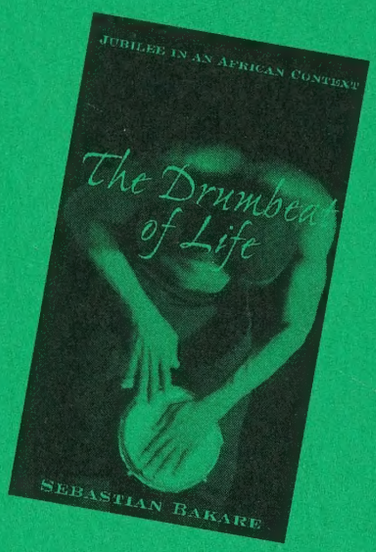

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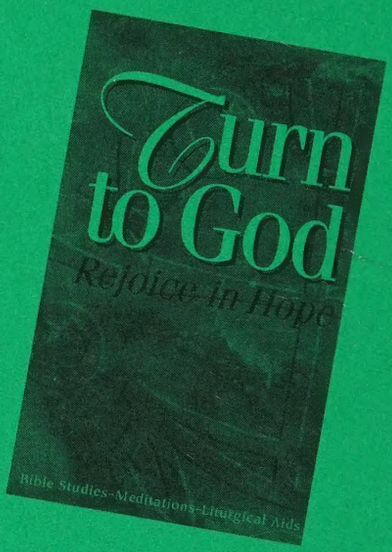

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